

# Leo VI and the Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity

Writings of an  
Unexpected Emperor

Meredith L. D. Riedel





# LEO VI AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF BYZANTINE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

## *Writings of an Unexpected Emperor*

The Byzantine emperor Leo VI (886–912), was not a general or even a soldier, like his predecessors, but a scholar, and it was the religious education he gained under the tutelage of the patriarch Photios that was to distinguish him as an unusual ruler. This book analyses Leo's literary output, focusing on his deployment of ideological principles and religious obligations to distinguish the characteristics of the Christian *oikoumene* from the Islamic caliphate, primarily in his military manual known as the *Taktika*. It also examines in depth his 113 legislative *Novels*, with particular attention to their theological prolegomena, showing how the emperor's religious sensibilities find expression in his reshaping of the legal code to bring it into closer accord with Byzantine canon law. Meredith L. D. Riedel argues that the impact of his religious faith transformed Byzantine cultural identity and influenced his successors, establishing the Macedonian dynasty as a 'golden age' in Byzantium.

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## *Foreword*

Leo VI (r. 886–912), known even in his own lifetime as ‘Leo the Wise’, was indeed a highly unusual emperor. He was the son of Basil I, founder of the Macedonian imperial dynasty (or according to some the son of Michael III, whom Basil had had murdered), and the father of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, one of the best known of Byzantine emperors and a well-known sponsor of humane learning. A student of the patriarch Photios, Leo VI was himself a scholar, a writer, a lawmaker, and a homilist, but he also deposed his teacher and replaced him with his own brother despite the fact that the latter was only 19 at the time. The same Leo later became one of the most notorious of emperors for his action in marrying four times, thus provoking the so-called Tetragamy crisis. A third marriage was frowned upon in ecclesiastical law, and to marry a fourth time seemed outrageous, even more so since Leo’s fourth wife was his former mistress, Zoe Karbonopsina. Zoe had already given birth to the future Constantine VII in the Purple Chamber of the imperial palace (hence Constantine’s epithet ‘Born in the Purple’), and the marriage took place not long afterwards. When the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos indignantly opposed the emperor despite the high view of ecclesiastical law that Leo took in his own legislation, the emperor deposed him as he had Photios.

Leo VI was a complex mixture, balancing what seem to have been heartfelt religious aims with the practical exigencies of maintaining his position and continuing the succession. A substantial corpus of writing is attributed to him, including the military and strategic manual known as the *Taktika*, the law code begun under Basil I going under the title of the *Basilika*, 113 new laws known as *Novellae*, and 42 homilies or speeches, which are the subject of Meredith L. D. Riedel’s book. Not all Leo’s works have survived, but the emperor also wrote poetry, much of it consisting of hymns and religious poems, and wrote or sponsored other legal works and commissioned works by others. Other works dating from his reign include the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos, an important source for orders of

precedence and the working of the administrative system, and the *Book of the Eparch*, which sought to regulate trades and guilds. Leo was referred to as 'Leo the Wise' even in his lifetime, and such was his later reputation as a sage that so-called *Oracles* were also attributed to him, consisting of oracular poems and other texts in both high-style and popular Greek to which later centuries ascribed prophetic power.

The reign of Leo has had a mixed reception among modern scholars. Despite Shaun Tougher's study of his reign, the excellent recent work of Theodora Antonopoulou on the homilies, and George Dennis and John Haldon on the *Taktika*, and the substantial amount of scholarship on Byzantine law, his works have usually been studied separately without attempting to ascertain overall themes, and in the past they have not always been greeted with appreciation by modern scholars. In contrast, Riedel, a Byzantinist teaching in a school of divinity, takes the *Taktika*, the *Novels*, and the homilies together and understands them collectively as expressions of Leo's religious commitment and desire to communicate a religious message. This is important, since in the *Taktika* Leo reworks earlier material to the extent that others have regarded the work as a derivative exercise drawn up by a non-military emperor rather than a practical guide. But the work is full of personal comments, and when we find the ideal general to whom the work is addressed being exhorted to base everything he does on prayer and to put God first, there seems no reason to doubt that the emperor meant it. As Haldon argues in the introduction to his commentary, the frequent and apparently personal observations in the text also suggest that they derive from Leo himself. Warfare against the Arabs was certainly a major concern, even if not the work's primary motivation, and this raises the question of how religious attitudes to warfare in Byzantium compared with the Islamic conception of holy war at a time when a greater awareness of Islam seems to be detectable in Byzantium.

Establishing direct imperial authorship is not a simple matter, any more than for the *Novels*; as with Justinian and the *Code*, there is no need to believe that Leo himself composed all the text of his laws any more than he did the whole of the *Taktika* (where there are also indications of composition in more than one stage). But again, the tone overall in the *Novels* is moral and religious, a 'cleansing' and pruning of earlier laws and replacing them with new laws, which Riedel argues were designed to produce a more fully Orthodox polity in the decades after the ending of iconoclasm. Both the *Taktika* and in a sense also the *Novels* are consistent with the type of advice literature identified both with Leo's father Basil I and his son Constantine VII. It is perhaps harder to discern a consistent message in

the body of 42 so-called homilies written in high style, which include a funeral oration for his father Basil I and range from speeches given on important occasions in the palace or other imperial settings to homilies delivered in various churches in Constantinople, but Leo was unusual for an emperor in engaging in this activity at all, let alone in leaving such a substantial corpus or one probably collected by Leo himself. Some of the homilies honour saints with a particular relevance for Leo and who were the dedicatees of churches built by his father Basil I or by himself. Taken together, the homilies suggest an emperor with a high sense of religious mission and teaching responsibility.

The intellectual and religious aims of this remarkable emperor clearly deserve more exploration than they have so far been given. Riedel sometimes enlivens her discussion with personal comments arising from her Protestant background and her experience in a divinity school. But her main argument, pursued in lively fashion through her book as a whole, gives us a Leo VI who was not only learned but also possessed of a strong desire to use his writings to convey a serious and consistent religious message.

**Averil Cameron**



## *Preface*

No one comes to Byzantium by a straight road, so my intellectual journey has been one of delightful surprises, with this book as a direct result. My interest in Byzantium was prompted by a trip to the Republic of Turkey during my seminary studies. Although Turkey is a secular Muslim country, we visited many obviously Christian church buildings decorated with astonishing gold mosaics of Christos Pantokrator ('Christ the almighty') left by the citizens of a vanished Christian empire. I soon discovered the surprising existence of Byzantium, founded by Constantine the Great in 330 CE and destroyed by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 CE. Its people spoke a dozen languages, its territory lay across three continents, and from beginning to end its inhabitants called their home the Roman empire, embraced the Christian religion, and ruled in the language and heritage of the Greeks. What particularly piqued my curiosity was the fact – still controversial among historians – that this Christian empire lost two-thirds of its territory in less than 20 years to adherents of the new Islamic religion in the early seventh century, but survived, held its borders against continual attack, and even thrived for another 800 years before succumbing. Only graduate work at the mother-lode of Byzantine studies (also affectionately known as 'the home of lost causes'), the University of Oxford, gave me satisfying answers, while also teaching me to ask better questions. There, I was trained as a historian, and of necessity along the way studied Byzantine Greek, Classical Syriac, Russian, Classical Arabic, and modern Greek. The road was long, but the fascination with Byzantium deepened, and now, more than a decade later, that curiosity remains strong.

This book found its genesis in a tutorial in 2004 with the venerable James Howard-Johnston, who assigned an essay on Byzantine military manuals. I wrote on five, all dating to the tenth century, and in the process discovered that the oldest of these, the *Taktika* of Leo VI, had never been translated into English yet appeared to have been seminal for the development of

all the others. Their promulgation also coincided with what has come to be known as the Byzantine reconquest, the uniquely successful period of territorial expansion that distinguished the Macedonian dynasty from the previous 300 years as well as from the following 400 years. James, ever attentive to military and political history, was less interested in my analysis of the religious language in these manuals, dismissing it with a regal wave of his hand as he called it ‘that thing you do’. The tender mercies of ‘HoJo’, as he was affectionately known, included that I learn Russian ‘because one cannot become a proper Byzantinist without it’ and countless tutorials amongst the teetering stalagmites of books in his office where his twinkling humour and passion for the scholarly endeavour pushed me to learn more than I had imagined possible.

My interest in the nexus of Byzantine religious language and military thought eventually focused on the *Taktika* of Leo VI, which at that point had never been translated into English. This led to an ongoing correspondence with George Dennis, SJ, who at that time was nearing completion on the first translation of the *Taktika* into English (Washington, DC, 2010, 2nd ed. 2014). Father Dennis was generous with his time and comments as we discovered that we were on the same path of discerning the theological perspective permeating the text. It was a great joy to see the publication of his translation in the same month as the completion of my doctoral thesis, though tinged with some sadness as Father Dennis had died just a few weeks earlier. The thesis was examined by the incomparable Averil Cameron and the eminent Jonathan Shepard, both at the peak of their powers and formidably thorough on the day. I was extraordinarily happy to pass with no corrections apart from a very few typos.

Constellations of superb scholars around the world have had a hand in developing my work. Early on, at Wellesley, I learned German as well as how to conduct research in a foreign language from the elegant and engaging Thomas Hansen. At Princeton, those research skills were refined using the Hebrew language under the guidance of my master’s thesis advisor, Jacqueline Lapsley, and especially with Ray van Leeuwen’s unforgettable tutelage in the wisdom of the biblical book of Proverbs. Tom Gillespie’s course on Romans 9–11 allowed me to combine insights from the Old Testament and the New, and most notably, was where I first began reading the work of renowned biblical scholar Richard Hays, whose influence on my journey increased even more when, as Dean of Duke Divinity, he hired me to teach the history of Christianity. His welcome and encouragement since then have nurtured my scholarship and provided an extraordinary and congenial professional home.

At Oxford, I was fortunate to learn from luminaries in the fields of history, language, theology, and Byzantine studies. From the very first week of the very first Michaelmas term, the erudite David G. K. Taylor gently encouraged a foray into Syriac language and literature leading to a brilliant postdoctoral fellowship at Oxford that significantly deepened my grasp on the historical context of Christianities indigenous to the Middle East. Greek reading classes with the inestimable Elizabeth Jeffreys, where we translated together Byzantine texts of terrifying complexity, stand out as a rite of passage. No less challenging, but certainly deeply encouraging, were Greek translation tutorials with the irrepressible and deeply learned Ida Toth. The warmth and support of the late Mark Whittow, who energetically encouraged me to pursue the literature of Leo VI, was given with characteristically impeccable timing; the unexpected loss of this man in late 2017 dealt a staggering blow to all of us who knew him. The venerable classicist Sir Fergus Millar helped hone habits of discipline and perseverance, and his kindness to me as a younger scholar cannot be overestimated. The postdoc year spent working with him was my happiest in Oxford. Canon Sarah Foot was tremendously encouraging, and I am grateful for her generosity, good advice, and personal warmth. Of all the dons at Oxford, two in particular stand out as determinative of my development as a scholar. First, Chris Wickham's pastoral care and intellectual leadership enabled me to finish well. Without his counsel and protection, dragons would have ravaged the land. My debt to him can never be repaid. Second, my doctoral supervisor, Catherine Holmes, gave me what I needed most: freedom to write what I thought and a light touch for essential corrections. Under her expert guidance, the thesis went from a series of disorganized thoughts to finished and submitted in less than two years.

Over the past six years, I have enjoyed the great good fortune to teach in a university divinity school, which has granted me space and opportunity to winkle out complexities previously unknown to me. The exploration of religious language in apparently military and political texts continues to intrigue me; this book is a direct result of that search. It represents both a narrowing and a broadening of my DPhil thesis, which examined the development of Byzantine Christian identity from the early ninth to the late tenth century. This book is focused on the writings of Leo VI alone, but includes consideration of writings from three genres: his military manual, his legislation (the 113 novels), and to a lesser degree his homilies, which are utterly unexpected compositions for a Byzantine emperor. Two chapters from the D.Phil. thesis, both on the *Taktika* itself, have been revised for inclusion here (Chapters 2 and 3). I remain pleased that John Haldon, who

read the final version of the thesis in 2010, generously confirmed that there was nothing in it with which he disagreed (at least, not at the time!). It was gratifying to see that he cited the thesis several times in his 2014 commentary on the text of the *Taktika*, in particular adopting my analysis of the structure of the text in terms of the importance of the religious vocabulary at the beginning and end of the manual. Although his work, as a commentary on the *Taktika*, had a different purpose from what I am presenting in this volume, the comprehensive scope of his scholarship has enabled me to move beyond the military manual to explore similar approaches in other literature produced by Leo VI. The other seven chapters of this book present new research, written while teaching full time on the tenure track at Duke University. The one semester of leave granted to me in the fall of 2016 enabled the production of the penultimate manuscript, and the summer of 2017 permitted me to complete [Chapters 7](#) and [8](#). Numerous aspects of every chapter have been presented at national and international conferences over the past six years, and I am very grateful for the interest and conversations elicited on those occasions.

Claudia Rapp, whose excellent mentorship often focused my professional life in the right directions, invited me to present a paper at the 2014 International Society of Biblical Literature conference in Vienna on the subject ‘The Bible in Byzantium’. The ideas found in [Chapter 4](#) on the Ideal Christian General were developed initially in that paper, titled ‘Echoes of Scripture in Byzantine Political Identity’. I am indebted to Ioannis Stouraitis for willingness to discuss this topic together during that conference and subsequent research trips to Vienna; he helped clarify my understanding and articulation of our shared approach to these texts. A volume of the collected papers from that conference, titled *The Bible in Byzantium: Text and Experience*, and edited by Claudia Rapp, Andreas Külzer, and Christian Gastgeber, is forthcoming in 2018 from Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. In Vienna, a serendipitous conversation with Theodora Antonopoulou over coffee at the Café Engländer affirmed the importance of Leo’s homilies, incurring a debt on my part for her generous attention to my questions about their significance.

In 2015, at the annual conference of the Southeastern Medieval Association, I presented some initial research on Leo’s legislation in a paper titled, ‘Leo VI and the Cleansing of the Law’, which was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Medieval Perspectives* in 2016; the fuller development of that research is presented here in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#). Additionally, some of the material from [Chapter 7](#) on Byzantine ‘chosenness’ was presented in 2017 at the annual conference for the Byzantine Studies Association of



North America (BSANA). Earlier versions of my thoughts in Byzantine Christian identity were enhanced by comments offered by Anthony Kaldellis at previous BSANA conferences in 2009 and 2011.

In recent years, rising interest in the role of religious language and especially the use of biblical texts in Byzantium has elicited an increasing number of conferences, articles, and monographs. The first chapter documents this literature and points to what I hope will become a sustained groundswell of academic work in this area. As a historian with theological training, my interest in Leo VI was naturally stimulated when I discovered that he was responsible for what seemed to be a virtual one-man upsurge in literature with a religious flavour, either subtle – as in his military manual – or more overt – as in his homiletical and even legislative writings. The approaches of biblical scholarship offer a particular prism for examining these historical texts, and thus I hope to integrate the insights of Byzantine and theological perspectives. Since Christianity has from the beginning been an Eastern religion, it seems to me an appropriate moment for Western scholarship to reckon more deeply with the distinctive easternness of Byzantine ideology and philosophy, and in particular their approach to the Christianness of the imperial project based in Constantinople.

Although I am not myself an Orthodox Christian, and cannot therefore analyse this faith tradition from the inside as it were, my position as a professor in a divinity school does require scholarly attentiveness to issues of religion. To my knowledge, I am the only professional Byzantinist occupying a post with such obligations, and thus my previous theological training and research interests currently coincide. I have long been interested in how the ideological commitments of the explicitly Christianized Byzantine empire and its attendant political exigencies coalesce, particularly with regard to religious boundaries. The idea of Byzantium as Christian underwent some degree of transformation under the high-level influence of the unusual emperor who stars in this book. The argument is that he had political reasons to bolster his own authority and employed religious ideology to do so. The historical context of Leo's reign, including regular contact with the 'Abbasid caliphate, compelled an emphasis on corporate religious identity reinforced via distinction to the Muslim other. My initial interest in his military manual, where he sought to shape combat philosophies by means of the piety of his generals, soon spread to questions about how he sought to strengthen the social fabric by means of pious legislation and outright homiletical exhortations. Underneath these literary goals lay Leo's understanding of Orthodox Christian theologies of chosenness and of leadership. The source of these answers can be found partially in ideas

indigenous to Byzantine culture, and more specifically in ecclesial and theological positions as exegeted from scripture and canon law. Throughout, I have sought to integrate history and theology, and to exploit the commonalities and discongruities of various genres in an attempt to scrutinize/decipher/interpret Leo's impact on Byzantine culture. The conclusions presented here are perhaps provisional, since so much of Byzantine literature in what was a prolific age of manuscript production offers opportunity for translation and further study.

My Duke colleagues on this quest have been a strong source of moral support and professional guidance. In particular, Stephen Chapman has consistently given excellent counsel, and his sense of humour never fails to put everything in perspective. The generous ear and wise exhortations of Willie Jennings (now at Yale) illuminated my path in puzzling times. The deep wisdom and pastoral care of Esther Acolatse (now at Toronto) nourished my soul. Ross Wagner is that rare colleague whose kindness reverberates for weeks, buoying the spirits. The jocularity of Will Willimon, our self-proclaimed 'peculiar prophet', has lightened many a tragic moment, and my favourite curmudgeon, Joel Marcus, reliably provides incisive comments that characteristically pierce the heart of the matter. Above all, Richard Hays's humility and scholarly brilliance have inspired the highest of goals.

The debts incurred by academic writers include more than intellectual mentors and colleagues. The members of my faculty writing groups, both online and at Duke, have helped immeasurably to advance this manuscript amid the clamour of teaching and advising hundreds of students. Regular writing retreats sponsored by the Thompson Writing Centre at Duke over the past two years have boosted flagging creative energies at key moments. I am grateful to my research assistants at Duke over the past five years for their aid in chasing down bibliographical references, checking Greek, and brainstorming interpretations of Byzantine Christian identities. These include Kevin Dumke, Christopher Howell, Brad Boswell, Philip Porter, and Bobby Douglas, all of whom are pursuing doctoral work of their own. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, whose very helpful suggestions improved this monograph. Any errors that might inadvertently remain are of course my responsibility and do not reflect the much-appreciated efforts of the reviewers and editors. Fortunately, I was in the good hands of the aptly named Michael Sharp, whose attentive meticulousness assured the highest quality result. The production staff at Cambridge University Press were also a joy to work with, especially Marianne Nield.

None of us is an island, and this manuscript would never have seen the light of day without the staunch support of family and friends. My deep gratitude belongs to Phyllis Jestice, a colleague who graciously read several early chapters, and to Judith Heyhoe, who very kindly compiled the indexes. My parents, Craig and Julie Dear, who raised me without a television so that I would read voraciously, deserve credit for creating a bibliophile whose natural habitat would be a library. My mother, a professional editor with an eagle eye, gave speedy and accurate feedback on dozens of drafts over the years. In Oxford, Graham and Valda Uden acted *in loco parentis*, providing true hospitality in a foreign land even to the point of collecting us from A&E after the accident that totalled our car. We might have thrown in the towel altogether at that point were it not for them. Ellie Gebarowski-Shafer, my writing partner at Oxford, faithfully met me every day at the Bodleian; her invigorating self-discipline helped me to stay on track and to expect the epiphanies. Fellow Byzantinist Maria Kouroumali lent an understanding ear, a steady shoulder, a ready smile, and the perfectly timed eye-roll when needed. She has proven to be one of the truest friends I have ever known. Ultimately of course, the mere idea of an academic career, much less the opportunity to satisfy my curiosity about Byzantium after that fateful journey to Turkey so many years ago, would never have come to fruition without the love and determination of my beloved husband, Detlev. This book is dedicated to him, *sine quo nihil*.



## Chronology

19 Sep 866	Leo VI born
6 Jan 870	crowned co-emperor
879	elder brother Constantine dies
882	married Theophano (d.897), daughter Eudokia died young
Aug 883	imprisoned under suspicion of treason by Basil I
20 Jul 886	released from house arrest by Basil I on the Feast of Elijah
30 Aug 886	ascended to sole rule after death of Basil I
886	deposed Photios; replaced him in December with brother Stephen; Homily 22 delivered at Stephen's ordination
887–92	113 <i>Novels</i> promulgated
888	Homily 14, eulogy for Basil I delivered 29 August
890	relics of St Lazarus translated to Constantinople
890	<i>Hexabiblos</i> , new edition of <i>Basilika</i> , appears
893	Stephen dies; replaced by Antony II Kauleas on 3 Aug
895	conspiracy against Leo led by Tzantzes, Zaoutzes' son
895 or 896	Theophano died on 10 November
896	defeated by the Bulgars at Bulgarophygon; paid tribute to Symeon I Bulgaria
Jul 898	married Zoe Zaoutzaina, daughter Anna born
899	<i>Kletorologion</i> appears; Zoe dies sometime after September
900	married Eudokia Baiana (d.12 Apr 901, in childbirth)
900s	wrote the <i>Taktika</i>
900	conspiracy against Leo by Basil the Epeiktes
12 Feb 901	Antony dies; replaced by Nicholas I Mystikos
902	Arabs take Taormina, Sicily
11 May 903	assassination attempt on Leo in Church of St Mokios
Aug 904	sack of Thessaloniki by the Arabs
Sep 905	son Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos born
906/7	revolt by <i>strategos</i> Andronikos Doukas

- 6 Jan 906 Constantine VII baptized  
 Jun 906 married Zoe Karbonopsina  
 Dec 906 Leo denied entrance to Hagia Sophia by Nicholas at Christmas
- 907 *Procheiros Nomos* replaces Photios's *Eisagoge*  
 Jan 907 Leo denied entrance to Hagia Sophia at Epiphany  
 Feb 907 Nicholas exiled (with metropolitans who supported him) and replaced by Euthymios, Leo's spiritual father, as patriarch
- Mar 907 Leo granted dispensation with penance  
 907 *Procheiros Nomos* replaced Photios's *Eisagoge*  
 15 May 908 Constantine VII crowned co-emperor  
 911 Treaty with the Rus  
 911/12 fleet of Himerios annihilated in the Aegean by Leo of Tripoli and Damian
- 11 May 912 dies aged 45; succeeded by brother Alexander, who reinstated Nicholas as patriarch by prior agreement with Leo

*The Reign of Leo VI*

Leo VI the Wise, emperor of the Byzantines 886–912, broke with three centuries of tradition. He was not a general or even a soldier, as his predecessors had been, but a scholar – a second son who became heir apparent through the untimely death of his older brother on the battlefield and gained a throne taken by his father Basil I (r. 867–86) after murdering Michael III (r. 842–67). It was the religious education he gained under the tutelage of the famous and influential Photios (patriarch from 858–67 and 877–86 CE) that was to distinguish Leo VI as an unusual ruler. The argument of this book is that Leo's Christian Orthodox worldview coloured every decision he made; the impact of his religious faith, traced through his extensive literary output, transformed Byzantine cultural identity and influenced his successors, establishing the Macedonian dynasty as a 'golden age' in Byzantium until the early eleventh century.

Leo's father, Basil I, also known as Basil the Macedonian, was forcibly married in 865 to Eudokia Ingerina, the mistress of the emperor Michael III (r. 842–67). Thus upon Leo's birth in September of 866, his parentage was cast under suspicion, a problem that his older brother Constantine, the son of Basil's first wife Maria and the original heir to the throne, did not have.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary chronicles record that Leo was likely the son of Michael, but modern scholars are divided. Either way, the truth cannot be known. The fact that Leo was born under a cloud of uncertainty is the relevant point, because it meant that this unexpected emperor had to contend with issues of legitimacy, yet was unable to rely upon the tradition of imperial strength through military service. The only possibility available to him was the power of religion, and he used it brilliantly to reinforce his authority over the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Leo's childhood and educational formation, see A. Vogt, 'La jeunesse de Léon VI le Sage', *Revue Historique* 174 (1934), 389–428. See also S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 110–21.

His reign has mostly been remembered by scholars as one characterized by the appalling moral failure of his tetragamy, particularly hypocritical in that his third and fourth marriages explicitly violated his own legislation. However, this somewhat lopsided view focuses on the sensational at the expense of one of the distinctive aspects of his rule – that is, its theological character. The advice written to Leo by his father after his promotion to heir apparent in 879 indicates that his education was intended to be based largely on the traditions of the Church, because it does not deal with how to be a good emperor so much as it addresses issues of religion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, scholars have identified Leo as an important ecclesiastical poet, putting him in the same company with John of Damascus and others of a decidedly theological bent.<sup>3</sup> Although Leo cannot be considered a theologian, strictly speaking, because he was not a churchman writing about doctrine as such, his literary output shows that he was interested in spiritual matters. Thus his writings may properly be classified as theological, because they are concerned with the practical application of religious ideals.

Leo was unique because he was unafraid to address areas in which one might normally think he had no business, like military science and preaching, for example. As a non-campaigning emperor with no training or background in military affairs, one would not expect Leo VI to write a military manual, nor might one expect him to write and deliver homilies, since no emperor before (or after) engaged ecclesiastical practice to this degree. Yet his activity as an emperor reveals a canny mind employing a consciously ideological programme of propaganda, a strength of will that when tested against the Church came out the victor, and a dedication to dynasty-building combined with a solid faith in the sovereignty of God and the teachings of the Church. The writings attributed to Leo VI illustrate his notion of his role as emperor; that is, as a legislator, a spiritual leader, and an organizer concerned with right order. They also reveal a

<sup>2</sup> The two parainetic texts, dated to 879 and 886, have been published in the *Patrologia Graeca* 107: XXI–LVI, LVII–LX. For a critical edition of the first text, see K. Emminger, ‘Studien zu den griechischen Fürstenspiegeln. II. Die spät-mittelalterliche Übersetzung der Demonicea. III. Βασιλείου κεφάλαια παραινετικά’, dissertation (Munich, 1913), 23–73. For a modern scholarly discussion of both texts, see A. Markopoulos, ‘Autour des *chapitres parénétiqes* de Basile 1er’, in *Eupsychia: mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1998), 2: 469–80; reprinted in *History and Literature of Byzantium in the 9th and 10th centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), XXI, 469–79. See also the conclusions of Antonopoulou on the theological character of Leo’s education in T. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, 1997), 5.

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion in Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Leo VI*, 19–20. See also N. G. Попов, *Императоръ Левъ VI. мудрый и его царствование въ церковно-историческомъ отношеніи* [The emperor Leo VI the Wise and his reign, from a historical-ecclesiastical point of view] (Moscow, 1892, reprinted 2008), 228–32.



creative mind that thought deeply about the survival of the Byzantine polity and the promotion of his own family 'mythology', both priorities that were also clearly visible in the extensive literary activities of his son, Constantine VII.

Most important, Leo was a ruler who was convinced of the importance of strong imperial authority, but it is difficult to discern whether his religious convictions were the source or the result of his views on rulership. In any case, this monograph intends to show how these two commitments were intertwined in the philosophy and activities of this unusual emperor.

### Leo's Literary Output

Leo's erudition found expression in the great number of writings he produced – orations, military texts, legislation, epistles, homilies, hymns, poetry, and even a work intended for the pastoral care of ascetics.<sup>4</sup> The question of whether the emperor wrote the literary works attributed to him remains difficult to prove definitively; his *modus operandi* as an author is even more obscure and must therefore remain largely conjectural. Indeed, no scholarly commentator on Leo's writings has attempted to describe it. However, the contours of the corpus – the choice of vocabulary and subject matter – indicate that this unusual emperor had a clear influence in shaping the literature attributed to him. In any case, there is little doubt that he engaged in scholarly pursuits, including calligraphy.<sup>5</sup>

For example, his consistent use of Θεός rather than τύχη in the *Taktika* reveals his prioritizing of Christian vocabulary over pagan, even when the sense might be similar. Conversely, in a show of erudition he chooses sometimes to use classical Greek words in homilies in places where one might expect perhaps a more biblical word, like using the classical word for 'errors' (ἀμπλακήματα) instead of 'sins' (ἀμαρτία) in his religious poetry. Even the lost collection of Leo's epistolography is, similarly to his other works, described in Skylitzes' chronicle as extremely didactic and written in an archaic manner, perhaps to reflect his sophistication.<sup>6</sup> Leo sometimes inserted himself into his writings in innovative ways, making

<sup>4</sup> A good and comprehensive summary of Leo's literary output can be found in Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Leo VI*, 16–23.

<sup>5</sup> *Life of Blasios*, 666D–E in H. Delehaye, ed., *Acta Sanctorum Novembris Tomus IV* (Brussels, 1925), 656–69. For Leo's interest in books, see A. Markopoulos, "Ἀποσημειώσεις στὸν Λέοντα ΣΤ τὸν Σοφὸ", in *Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1994), 193–201.

<sup>6</sup> Skylitzes 34 in J. C. Cheynet (ed.), *Jean Skylitzes, Empereurs de Constantinople*, tr. B. Flusin (Paris, 2003), 162.

himself the focus of the piece, by, for example, relating his own story or personal reactions in his orations for the feast day of Elijah and the funeral of his parents.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, among others, Kazhdan has called Leo a ‘controversial’ and ‘innovative experimenter’ in his literary endeavours; it is this quality across the Leonine corpus that perhaps best indicates his authorial signature.<sup>8</sup> The present study will highlight Leo’s distinctive articulation of his religious worldview through his literary output, with a particular focus on his *Novellae* (or new laws), some homilies, and pre-eminently, his military manual.

Between Justinian I (r. 527–65) and Leo VI, every Byzantine emperor had personally faced Byzantium’s enemies on the field of battle. Since the defeat of Heraclius’s forces at the Yarmuk River in 636, every Byzantine emperor had been forced to reckon with the formidable threat of Muslim aggression. Until Leo, none of them had ever thoughtfully considered in any extant writing how to counter that threat. His riposte was in the form of a military manual entitled τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδοσις, or more commonly, *Tactical Constitutions* (hereafter *Taktika*). This book is long, comprising a prologue, 20 chapters or constitutions (διατάξεις) and a lengthy epilogue.<sup>9</sup> A modern critical edition and English translation was published in 2010; the accompanying commentary appeared in 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Why did Leo VI, a non-campaigning emperor, write an innovative military manual? The answer suggested in this book is that he did it not only to bolster morale and revivify military science, as he understood it, but to strengthen the motivation of his generals in terms of their Christian faith commitments, particularly when fighting against the armies of the caliphate. It is nonetheless curious that he would choose to revive an apparently defunct genre of imperial writing, and even more surprising that he would introduce innovations, which Byzantines characteristically and explicitly denigrate.<sup>11</sup> Despite the usual protestations that he was

<sup>7</sup> For more on the homilies, see [Chapter 8](#).

<sup>8</sup> A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, ed. C. Angelidi (Athens, 2006), 65.

<sup>9</sup> Leo’s text appears to use only three sources: the first-century *Strategikos* of Onesandros, mostly in the first part; the early second-century *Taktike theoria* of Aelian for definitions; and the late sixth-century *Strategikon* of Maurice for the arrangement of the material. All three are edited into a manual that reflects Leo’s ideological worldview. The most original and interesting constitutions are the final three on enemies (including for the first time ‘Saracens’), naval warfare, and collected maxims.

<sup>10</sup> G. T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2010). J. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> On the Byzantines’ horror of νεοτερισμός, see H. Hunger, ‘On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–4 (1969–70), 15–38.

merely compiling ancient documents to restore a lost body of knowledge, Leo presents a fresh interpretation of Byzantium's ongoing military difficulties.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he gives an unprecedented solution that involves the employment of Orthodox Christian beliefs and language. His focus was on religion in addition to strategy, and this combination was effective because it reanimated Byzantine Orthodox identity and articulated a blueprint for Christian soldiers in battle. Chapters 2–4 explore these prescriptions for Byzantine warfare and the perspective of Leo's *Taktika*.

Leo's judicial writings indicate an emperor concerned with organizing, codifying, and properly applying wisdom – both his and that of his predecessors – to improve the Byzantine empire. Although Justinian (r. 527–65) promulgated more laws than any other Byzantine emperor (c.600), from Justinian to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, emperors established only about 300 new laws.<sup>13</sup> Leo VI wrote 113 of those, making him the most active imperial legislator of the empire's final eight centuries. Not since Justinian had an emperor addressed such a wide range of contemporary issues with a view to improving the functioning of the state. By far his greatest contributions are the legal works. The most encyclopaedic endeavour of his reign, the six-volume *Basilika* was a revision of the Justinianic code, begun by Basil I. Leo also wrote 113 new laws, the content of which reveal his earnest desire to 'cleanse' government and society of the corrupt and obsolete.<sup>14</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 address the content, scope, and significance of Leo's legislative output in the *Novels*.

In the homilies, Leo's view of his role as the spiritual leader of the empire is plainly evident. Antonopoulou observes that the epilogues 'always call for God's protection on the chosen emperor and his people and . . . the emperor conceives himself as responsible for the people's spiritual guidance'.<sup>15</sup> The *Book of the Eparch*, a manual for the prefect of Constantinople, details the administration of urban guilds and is conventionally attributed to Leo

<sup>12</sup> On the Byzantines' combination of mimesis and innovation, see H. Hunger, 'The Reconstruction and Conception of the Past in Literature', in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers* (New Rochelle, NY, 1986), 510.

<sup>13</sup> M.-Th. Fögen, 'Legislation in Byzantium: A Political and a Bureaucratic Technique', in A. Laiou and D. Simon, eds., *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 54.

<sup>14</sup> The title of Leo's book containing the 113 novels reveals his purpose: Λεόντος ἐν Χριστῷ ἀθάνατω παντῶν βασιλεὶ εὐσεβοῦς βασιλέως Ρωμαίων αἱ τῶν νόμων ἐπανορθωτικαὶ ἀνακαθάρσεις. Literally: 'Leo, in Christ the immortal king of all, pious emperor of the Romans, The purifications for correcting the laws.' For further discussion, see J. Shepard, 'Byzantium in Equilibrium, 886–944', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 1999), 3: 553.

<sup>15</sup> Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI*, 43.

VI.<sup>16</sup> Of the many lists that detail relative status in the Byzantine empire, only the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos, promulgated under Leo VI, carried the weight of law by imperial decree – no other such text known to modern scholarship has received such a firm confirmation.<sup>17</sup>

The diversity of his literary production reveals Leo the scholar, a man who fittingly earned the epithet ‘the Wise’ even during his own lifetime. Wisdom, in the biblical worldview of the Old Testament, is closely allied with law-giving. The wisdom of Solomon, for example, was granted as a gift from God and is illustrated by his wisdom in adjudicating legal disputes.<sup>18</sup> It has been argued that the Macedonian dynasty, in attributing wisdom to Leo, was presenting him as a new Solomon to Basil I’s David.<sup>19</sup> Most Byzantine emperors embraced the role of David, a military man whose kingship was based on victory in warfare as well as divine blessing.<sup>20</sup> Basil I drew the parallel based on his rise from obscurity (David the shepherd boy, Basil the stable boy), his accession to the throne after an unpopular king (Saul, Michael III), and the death of his firstborn as an expiation for murder (Uriah, Michael III), leaving his second son to succeed him as ‘the Wise’ (Solomon, Leo).<sup>21</sup> Like Solomon, Leo was a lover not a fighter, and embraced the role of Solomon as equally biblical, equally powerful, and equally kingly.

As a wise king in the mould of Solomon, therefore, Leo exemplified the role of legislator. This is how he presents the *Taktika* as well. Leo himself did not view this work as a book to be read with mere theoretical interest, but rather as a set of binding regulations, a manual with prescriptive and legal force. In the prologue, he states clearly that the military leaders addressed

<sup>16</sup> The text is formally attributed to Leo in the prologue, calling it Διατάξεις Λέοντος. J. Koder, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* (Vienna, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles: introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire* (Paris, 1972), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Solomon asked for ‘a discerning heart to distinguish between right and wrong’ which is essentially wisdom for administering justice (1 Kings 3:9).

<sup>19</sup> C. Jolivet-Lévy, ‘L’image du pouvoir dans l’art byzantin à l’époque de la dynastie macédonienne (867–1056)’, *Byzantium* 57 (1987), 441–70. See also P. Magdalino, ‘The Bath of Leo the Wise and the “Macedonian Renaissance” Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial and Ideology’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 97–118.

<sup>20</sup> A classic example is Leo’s grandson, Basil II, as depicted on the frontispiece of his psalter in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice (Cod. Marc. gr. 17). A. Cutler, ‘The Psalter of Basil II [part 2]’, *Arte Veneta* 31 (1977), 9–15.

<sup>21</sup> On Basil’s identification with David, see A. Markopoulos, ‘Constantine the Great in Macedonian historiography’, in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 159–70. On Leo’s identification with Solomon, see S. Tougher, ‘The Wisdom of Leo VI’, in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 171–9.

in the book are not free to choose which constitutions to apply and which to disregard; the entire work is to have the force of legislation.<sup>22</sup> Predictably, everything Leo writes is to be accepted as imperial instruction, not suggestion, and the language of obligation that he uses makes this clear.<sup>23</sup>

### Scope of Argument

Leo VI's innovative focus on religious motivation emerged from a ninth-century context in which Islam continued to present a challenge to Byzantium. By the mid-tenth century, momentum had shifted towards a Byzantine advance.<sup>24</sup> The main objective of this study is to explore the development, uses, and limits of Christian religion as a vital force in Byzantine cultural identity, highlighted in part by changing relations with Muslims. In this light, it is concerned with intellectual history, with militarized politics and an analysis of the viscera of behaviour between Christianity and Islam, and in particular, the development of a consciously Christian political identity in Byzantium. The body of scholarship which approaches Byzantine–Arab relations by taking account of religion has traditionally done so retrospectively, through the lens of the Crusades, viewing the Byzantine use of religious language as a kind of holy war, but this conclusion rests on assumptions that one might argue are not borne out by the Byzantine understanding of Christian faith and practice.<sup>25</sup> Nowhere does a political or military leader in Byzantium call the adherents of Orthodox Christianity to rise up against unbelievers, to forcibly convert them, or to kill them if they do not convert, so that they might gain a spiritual benefit as a result of engaging in this sort of armed conflict.<sup>26</sup> Although religion was employed

<sup>22</sup> *Taktika*, prooimion, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 677C. “Ὡσπερ οὖν ἄλλον τιὰ πρόχειρον νόμον ὑμῖν, ὡς εἶρηται, στρατηγικὸν τὴν παρούσαν πραγματείαν ὑπαγορεύοντες προσεχῶς τε καὶ ἐπιπόνως ἀκούειν ὑμῶν παρακελεύομεθα. Dennis, *Taktika*, 6, lines 60–4.

<sup>23</sup> P. Magdalino, ‘The Non-Judicial Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI’, in S. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 169–82; J. Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Trois études sur Léon VI’ *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), 229.

<sup>24</sup> E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995). J. D. Howard-Johnston, ‘Studies in the Organisation of the Byzantine Army in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries’ (University of Oxford, unpublished DPhil thesis, 1971), 188.

<sup>25</sup> The most recent example here would be the latter half of the excellent volume edited by J. Koder and I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion* (Vienna, 2012), especially Kolia-Dermitzakis's contribution.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, whenever Byzantine rhetoric approached this, they quickly reversed themselves out of an unwillingness to be like their Muslim enemies in this way. J. C. Cheynet, ‘La guerre sainte à Byzance au Moyen Âge: un malentendu’, in D. Balou and Ph. Josserand (eds.), *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte. Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin (XI–XIIIe siècle)* (Toulouse, 2006), 13–32.

to serve political and military goals, it was shown ultimately to have a clear limit in the Byzantine *mentalité* that stopped short of true holy war.<sup>27</sup>

As one would expect of a state engaged in continual warfare on various fronts, the early medieval Byzantine empire was highly militarized. The consensus of scholars has been that this militarization was undertaken for the primary purpose of protecting Byzantium from conquest by eastern Arabs, themselves newly inspired by the rise of Islam.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the tsunami of Islam in the seventh century resulted in removing Byzantium as a regional superpower and relegated it to 'a medium sized regional state based on Constantinople, fighting a dour battle for survival'.<sup>29</sup> Most historians have stressed mainly that Byzantium adapted tactical and governmental structures from late antiquity to meet the threat. The cultural factors that kept the army and indeed the Byzantine state from disintegrating in the face of repeated Arab raids have not been as closely examined. Byzantium was a culture steeped in the Orthodox Christian religion, which harnessed both people and emperor to the service of a distinctively Christianized Old Testament deity. It is their religious orientation that was most influential in their culture; war was always seen as a necessary evil. Religion was not a tool in making war. Rather, war was suffused with religious ideas, just like daily life. The role of faith in Byzantine political thinking has been underestimated, and particularly its influence in warfare.<sup>30</sup>

### Features of Leo's Reign

At the accession of Leo VI in 886, the Byzantine empire enjoyed peace with all their neighbours except the Arabs.<sup>31</sup> To the north, the Bulgars were ruled by Boris-Michael (r. 852–89), who had converted to Christianity in

<sup>27</sup> Holy war is here defined as offensive warfare proclaimed by a religious authority and undertaken for the purpose of effecting not only a physical or political change, but also a spiritual change in either those practising it or in their opponents.

<sup>28</sup> A. Pertusi, 'La formation des thèmes byzantins', in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress*, 1 (Munich, 1958), 1–40 (Reihenfolge); G. Ostrogorsky, 'Korreferat zu Pertusi, La formation des thèmes byzantins', in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress*, 1 (Munich, 1958), 1–8 (Korreferate).

<sup>29</sup> M. Whitton, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), 96.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); A. Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton, 2014); J. Herrin, *Margins and Metropolis: Authority Across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, 2013); D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the historical background of the reign of Leo's predecessor, see Basilikè N. Blysidou, 'Εξωτερική πολιτική και εσωτερικές αντιδράσεις την εποχή του Βασιλείου Α'. Έρευνες για τον έντοπισμό των αντιπολιτευτικών τάσεων στα χρόνια 867–886 [Ιστορικές Μονογραφίες 8] (Athens, 1991).

the 860s and inaugurated a new era of peaceful relations with Byzantium. In the west, Italy and Sicily were still nominally under the authority of Constantinople, but trouble was brewing in the form of ascendant Arab sea power. To the east, continual skirmishing with the Arabs along the frontier became increasingly characteristic of the region. But for the first decade or so of Leo's reign, relations with the Arabs were a minor irritant, as his attention and military resources were in demand elsewhere, to the north and west.<sup>32</sup>

The Balkans were to prove troublesome for the first decade of Leo's reign. In 889, Boris-Michael, the Bulgarian king, abdicated, leaving a vacuum of leadership until his younger son, Symeon, took power in 893. Destined to become the greatest ruler of the medieval Bulgarian kingdom, Symeon was driven by a restless ambition. Shortly after he came to power, hostilities broke out between the Bulgars and the Byzantines, ostensibly over a commercial dispute involving a decision made by Leo's highest-ranked advisor, Stylianos Zaoutzes.<sup>33</sup> What followed was a 'disastrous and humiliating war'.<sup>34</sup> Leo recalled distinguished general Nikephoros Phokas from Calabria to take command of the Byzantine defences. Symeon invaded Byzantine territory in 894 but was thwarted by rearguard attacks from Magyars answering the cry for help from their Byzantine allies. Symeon was forced to concede a truce, but subsequently enlisted the aid of the Pechenegs from the steppes north of the Black Sea and decisively defeated the Byzantines, led by Leo Katakalon, in 896 at Bulgarophygon in Thrace, 160 kilometres west of Constantinople. As terms of the peace thereafter (which was to last only 17 years), Byzantium was under obligation to the Bulgarians to pay annual tribute.<sup>35</sup> It was only after this that Leo was able to turn his attention to the east, and indeed, he did not compose his main treatise on military affairs, the *Taktika*, until after the peace with the Bulgars had been finalized.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For a fuller discussion of general relations between Byzantium and its neighbours, see Whitton, *Making of Byzantium*; Tougher, *Reign of Leo VI*; and A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2, part 2, tr. and rev. M. Canard (Brussels, 1968).

<sup>33</sup> Ostrogorsky summarizes: 'Two Byzantine merchants had been given the monopoly of the Bulgar trade ... and had removed the Bulgarian market from Constantinople to Thessalonica and very much increased the duty.' G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999), 256. J. Shepard, 'Bulgaria: The Other Balkan "empire"', in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 1999), 3: 567–85.

<sup>34</sup> P. Magdalino, 'Saint Demetrios and Leo VI', *Byzantinoslavica* 51 (1990), 200.

<sup>35</sup> For a general discussion of relations between Constantinople and the Bulgars, see Whitton, *Making of Byzantium*, 270–98.

<sup>36</sup> The *Taktika* mentions the war with the Bulgars, but no other Byzantine battles after that, providing a *terminus post quem* for the manual of 896 or 897. See Haldon, *Commentary*, 59–60, who discusses

The eastern frontier legacy Leo inherited from his father Basil I was generally one of weakness, with a few bright spots. From 860 onwards, Arab raids on Byzantine lands were joined by the Paulicians, a Christian sect of Armenian origin – considered heretical by Chalcedonian Christian Byzantines – who had established themselves in the 840s on the Upper Euphrates. They raided as far as Ephesos on the west coast in 867 and were not decisively defeated until 872.<sup>37</sup> The Armenian Bagratuni princes were somewhat easier to persuade, despite their earlier participation in the sack of Amorion in 838.<sup>38</sup> In August of 884, Ashot I was crowned king of Armenia (albeit with a crown given by the caliph) and declared to be a ‘beloved son’ of Basil I.<sup>39</sup>

Basil I also personally led several campaigns against the Muslims in the east, achieving a few limited victories. In 873, he led an expedition that brought victories over Samosata and Zapetra but failed at Melitene.<sup>40</sup> In 878, he led the army to victories at Germanikeia and Adata, and oversaw the final defeat of the Paulicians at Tephrike. These were duly celebrated in Constantinople with celebrations that perhaps outweighed their importance. He attempted to spin his patchy successes on the eastern frontier into more significant triumphs, celebrating victory parades on at least two occasions, with the 879 parade featuring the display of Muslim captives, various liturgical chants at ten different stations along the triumphal route, and a ceremonial greeting from the patriarch.<sup>41</sup>

McCormick has noted that both celebrations included the obligatory entry through the Golden Gate and a procession from there to the Forum of Constantine, punctuated by acclamations from the people. At the Forum, the emperor (accompanied by his son Constantine) changed from military garb

evidence for original composition no later than 904. See also Dennis, *Taktika*, 452. Cf. P. Karlin-Hayer, ‘La mort de Théophano (10 nov. 896 ou 895)’ *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 62 (1969), 13–19; reprinted in P. Karlin-Hayer, *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), ch. 11.

<sup>37</sup> A. Lesmüller-Werner and H. Thurn (eds.), *Iosephi Genesisii regum libri quattuor*, *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae* 14 (Berlin, 1978), 86.

<sup>38</sup> *Genesisios*, *On the Reigns of the Emperors* III.13, 47, tr. A. Kaldellis (Leiden, 2017). Greenwood says this was a ‘rare instance of active service by Armenian forces against Byzantium’. T. W. Greenwood, ‘Armenian Neighbours (600–1045)’, in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 349.

<sup>39</sup> Greenwood, ‘Armenian Neighbours’, 353.

<sup>40</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 268, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838); P. Lemerle, ‘L’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1969), 108.

<sup>41</sup> J. F. Haldon (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: Three Treatises on Imperial Expeditions*, *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae* (Vienna, 1990), Text C, lines 724–807 (pp. 140–7). See the extended discussion in M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 212–26.



to robes and walked from there to the Hagia Sophia for a eucharistic liturgy.<sup>42</sup> A new feature of this liturgy involved the patriarch Photios crowning the emperor with a crown of victory in a thinly veiled act of ecclesiastical approval for the hegemony of the usurper.

However, these 'victories' faded against the grim losses that befell Byzantium in the waning years of Basil I's reign. The Byzantine army was defeated at Melitene in 882 and crushed at Tarsus in 883, losing the Domestic of the Scholai as well as the *strategoï* of the Anatolikon and Kappadokian themes to fatal wounds.<sup>43</sup> The fortress of Melitene on the plateau west of the Anti-Taurus mountains remained an Arab base, along with Tarsus, for launching raids against Byzantium. From 882 until 891, the emir of Tarsus, Yāzāman al-Khādīm, launched not only land attacks on Byzantium, but he was also 'renowned for the raids of his naval squadrons'.<sup>44</sup> The city was therefore viewed as a primary threat to Byzantine defences both by land and by sea. In the *Taktika*, Leo specifically refers to the menace posed by Tarsus, Adana, and other towns of Cilicia that served as forward bases for Muslim attacks.<sup>45</sup>

The Arab geographer Kudama, writing in the 930s but using earlier material, indicates that the Arabs mounted three raids each year against the Byzantines, in late winter, mid spring, and for several months in the summer.<sup>46</sup> According to other Arab historians, annual raids on the Byzantines formed a regular feature in the medieval Muslim frontier calendar.<sup>47</sup> These annual raids demanded Leo's attention for most of his reign; combined with the naval raids of Muslim pirates, this military challenge provoked the composition during the 890s of his ground-breaking military manual, the *Taktika*.<sup>48</sup> Leo also created several new eastern themes and *kleisourai* in a bid to organize the defences of the empire more effectively. He cultivated relations with the Bagratuni

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *De ceremoniis* 1.96; A. Moffatt and M. Tall (eds.) *Constantine Porphyrogenetos, The Book of Ceremonies*, Vols. 1–2 (Canberra, 2012), 438. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 156–7.

<sup>43</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 286–8. *Al-Tabarī, History of Al-Tabarī* 270, tr. P. M. Fields (New York, 1987), 37: 143–4.

<sup>44</sup> J. Pryor and E. Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006), 62.

<sup>45</sup> *Taktika*, Constitution 18.125, *Patrologia Graeca* 107.976B. Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.119, pp. 480–2.

<sup>46</sup> E. W. Brooks, 'Byzantines and Arabs in the Time of the Early Abbasids', *English Historical Review* 15 (1900), 730.

<sup>47</sup> Notably Al-Baladhuri (c.868), Ibn Wadhih or Al-Ya'kubi (873), Al-Tabarī (915), and the work known as 'Kitāb al-'Uyun', or the 'Book of Springs' (late eleventh century).

<sup>48</sup> Dating of such a long text is difficult, but there is reason to believe it was begun in the 890s if not finished until c.904. See Haldon's discussion of the dating, including three firm chronological references in the text itself (*Commentary*, 59–66).

princes of Armenia, sending gifts, appointing *kleisourarchs*, receiving prisoners, and interceding on their behalf with other client rulers.<sup>49</sup> In order to strengthen the eastern frontier, he also sought the support of a number of Armenian *strategoï*, among them the highly successful Melias, promoted to *kleisourarch* of Lykandos, and Manuel, from the mountains north of Melitene with his four sons Panktratoukas, Iachnoucas, Moudaphar, and John.<sup>50</sup>

The eastern frontier was not the only theatre of conflict with Muslim Arabs demanding attention in the late ninth century. Sea-based attacks on Byzantine territories in the Aegean as well as farther afield in the Mediterranean continued to escalate, later becoming one of the primary challenges of Leo's reign. Muslim naval supremacy had been established at the famous Battle of the Masts (Dhat al-Sawari) off the Lycian coast in 655, when the emperor Constans II barely escaped with his life.<sup>51</sup> That rout was foretold in a dream, according to Theophanes, where the emperor dreamed on the night before battle that he was in Thessaloniki. This was interpreted to mean, by way of a pun, 'Give victory to another' (Θέξ ἄλλω νίκην).<sup>52</sup> By the ninth century, the Byzantines had to reckon with more than imperial dreams. According to al-Bukhārī, the famous hadith scholar (810–70), Muslim sailors who died fighting the Byzantines would receive double the divine reward available to land-based soldiers who made the same sacrifice.<sup>53</sup> If true, this would have had an impact on the morale of Muslim sailors and may have contributed to the rising incidence of warfare with the Byzantine navy.

<sup>49</sup> For details and a fuller discussion, including relevant bibliography, see Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours', 353.

<sup>50</sup> *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik, tr., R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington, DC, 1967), §50, 120–5, 152, 156. For more on ties between the Macedonian dynasty and Armenians, see Eleonora Kountoura-Galake, 'The Armeniac Theme and the Fate of its Leaders', in S. Lampakes (ed.), *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th cent.)* (Athens, 1998), 27–38.

<sup>51</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6146, in C. Mango and R. Scott (eds.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), 482. The universal chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233) describes the religious behaviour on both sides during that battle, with the Muslims spending the night reciting verses from the Qur'an, while the Byzantines rang bells. C. J. Tornberg (ed.), *Ibn al-Athīr. Kitāb al-Kāmil fi'l-Tārikh (The Perfect Book in History)*, 12 vols. (Beirut, 1967), 3: 58.

<sup>52</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 482.

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Jāmi as-Sabīh*, ed. Ludolf Krehl (Leiden, 1864), 2: 199–200. For more on the importance of morale in naval warfare manuals both Byzantine and Arab, see V. Christides, 'Two Parallel Naval Guides of the Tenth Century: Qudāma's Document and Leo VI's Naumachica. A Study on Byzantine and Moslem Naval Preparedness', *Graeco-Arabica* 1 (1982), 51–103.

Ever since the loss of Crete in 827, the threat of Arab pirates had been a concern for the Byzantines. Arab pirates based on Crete, as well as in Sicily and southern Italy, ravaged the Mediterranean, raiding Dalmatia in 872. In 873, the Byzantine admiral Niketas Ooryphas engaged them off Kardia at the head of the Gulf of Saros, destroying 20 ships.<sup>54</sup> Syracuse was attacked in 869 and 873, finally falling to the Arabs in 878 after a nine-month siege; its population was massacred.<sup>55</sup> In the 880s, Basil I sent his best general, Nikephoros Phokas, to regain control of southern Italy,<sup>56</sup> and attempted to invade Sicily in 888, but was defeated at sea.<sup>57</sup> He created new naval themes to counter the Muslim sea-based threat.<sup>58</sup> However, these measures appear to have been largely ineffective, and Byzantine vulnerability to seaborne warfare visibly increased, despite Basil's efforts. Theophanes Continuatus reports Basil's awareness of the Arab threat from the sea, claiming that the emperor knew an Arab fleet was being built in Egypt and Syria to attack the Byzantine capital. Thus he prepared a fleet to defend Constantinople; at the same time, he provided land-based work for the sailors to prevent a slide in discipline. They were employed building the palace chapel dedicated to Elijah the Tishbite, one of the biblical figures adopted by Basil as divine patron.<sup>59</sup> Thereafter, he remarks that the Arab spy from Syria returned home to report the futility of attacking and therefore the Arab fleet was not launched.<sup>60</sup>

But the growing threat of sea-based attack became a major concern for Leo VI as well. A *strategos* of the maritime theme – itself a recent innovation – was taken prisoner by Arab pirates based on Crete when the island of Samos was raided in 891.<sup>61</sup> In 898, a fleet from Tarsus destroyed a Byzantine fleet, 'capturing numerous ships and beheading 3000 seamen'.<sup>62</sup> This significantly damaged Byzantium's sea-based defences, allowing Muslim ships to attack at will until the fleet could be rebuilt. The Arabs

<sup>54</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus* v.61, 312. Skylitzes 21.181–23.183; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 152–4. Cf. John Wortley (tr.), *John Skylitzes. A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge, 2010), 175–7.

<sup>55</sup> Theodosios the Monk, Letter, C. O. Zuretti (ed.), 'La espugnazione di Siracusa nell' 880', in E. Besta (ed.), *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910), 165–73.

<sup>56</sup> H. Grégoire, 'La carrière du premier Nicéphore Phocas', in *ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ εἰς Στιλπωνα Π. Κυριακίδη* (Thessaloniki, 1953), 232–54.

<sup>57</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus* v.71, 312–13.

<sup>58</sup> H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer, la marine de guerre, la politique, et les institutions maritimes de Byzance au VIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1966), 96–9.

<sup>59</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus* v.68, 312. Skylitzes 35.158; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 132. 1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 2:11 for the story of Elijah.

<sup>60</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus* v.68, 312. Skylitzes 35.158, 132.

<sup>61</sup> Skylitzes 9.175; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 146.

<sup>62</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*, 62. *History of Al-Tabari* 285 (Fields, 38: 73).

held Malta and Syracuse, and in August 902 Taormina, the last Byzantine foothold on Sicily, fell to the Arabs, effectively ending Byzantine rule. The Aegean islands and coastal towns were also vulnerable to Arab raids, and in 902, despite stiff resistance, the wealthy city of Demetrias on the coast of Thessaly was destroyed. In the spring of 903, the island of Lemnos also fell, with many of its inhabitants taken as prisoners by the Arabs. Between 909 and 916, inscriptions indicate that the sea walls at Attaleia on the southern coast of Asia Minor were strengthened, with an inner wall added specifically to defend against Muslim pirates.<sup>63</sup>

The late eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes, using a hostile source, writes that Leo continued the practice of his father and used the sailors of the Byzantine fleet as manpower for his building projects in the capital; he blames this preoccupation with building for the failure of the Byzantine fleet to prevent the loss of Taormina.<sup>64</sup> Whether or not this is true, it is still the case that Leo was aware of the threat and moved to address it by strengthening the Kibyrrhaiot maritime theme, promoting naval officers, and devoting an unusual chapter in his military manual to the tactics of naval warfare: the famous Constitution 19.

Ironically, the two most famous admirals of the Arab fleet, Leo of Tripoli and Damianos (emir of Tyre),<sup>65</sup> were both Greeks who had converted to Islam while prisoners of the caliphate.<sup>66</sup> It was they who led the naval expeditions that did the most damage to the Byzantine empire. In the summer of 904, an Arab flotilla of 54 vessels entered the Dardanelles to approach Constantinople, the beating heart of Byzantium. Along the way, Leo of Tripoli sacked Abydos, a well-fortified customs post near the Byzantine capital. The anxiety of Constantinople's inhabitants was assuaged only when the Arab ships turned aside before the massed Byzantine fleet without giving battle. The Byzantines, naturally, credited their deliverance as a decision of God, but Christides thinks the 'attack' on Constantinople

<sup>63</sup> F. Trombley, 'War, Society and Popular Religion in Byzantine Anatolia (6th–13th Centuries)', in S. Lampakes (ed.), *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th centuries)* (Athens, 1998), 125–7.

<sup>64</sup> Skylitzes 21.181, 152. Theophanes Continuatus, who is generally more positive about Leo VI, does not make this comment, but it is well known that Leo continued his father's campaign to repair old and construct new churches in the capital. For the relevant bibliography on Leo's church-building activities, see S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, 118 n.61.

<sup>65</sup> Skylitzes 33.191; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 161.

<sup>66</sup> D. Frenzo and A. Fotiou (eds. and trs.), *John Kaminiates, On the Capture of Thessaloniki* (Perth, 2000), §24, 43. Leo of Tripoli is known in Byzantine sources as 'Leo Tripolitis' or 'Tripolitis, a former citizen of Attaleia'. (*Theophanes Continuatus* 366.14; Skylitzes 21.182, 153) In the Arabic sources, he is called Ghulam Zurafa, 'servant of Zurafa'; Zurafa was governor of Tripoli from 863. *History of Al-Tabari* 283 (Fields 38: 34).

was just a diversionary tactic.<sup>67</sup> Their primary target, he argues, was always Thessaloniki, situated on the Via Egnatia and endowed with a large port. It was a wealthy and important hub of commercial and cultural life, second only in prestige to Constantinople. Moreover, the Arabs had received information from Byzantine captives that the city had no sea walls and was therefore vulnerable to attack.<sup>68</sup>

News that an attack on Thessaloniki was imminent spurred Leo VI to send, according to Kaminiates, not only one but two generals to oversee the city's defences.<sup>69</sup> Although they had prior warning and attempted to build a sea wall as well as a *porporella*,<sup>70</sup> lack of time meant that neither was finished by the time the Arab fleet arrived. The city fell after only three days, on 31 July 904. A bloodbath ensued, with the Arabs taking purportedly 20,000 prisoners and vast amounts of booty. Al-Tabarī reports 5000 Byzantines killed, 4000 Muslim prisoners freed, 60 ships captured, and 1000 gold dinars received as booty by each Arab sailor.<sup>71</sup> The threat posed by the Arab fleet was real and the devastating sack of Thessaloniki in 904 proved it.<sup>72</sup>

From every direction, Byzantium was challenged by Muslim raiders for the entire length of Leo VI's reign. Shepard notes the seriousness of the threat from the eastern frontier as well as from the sea:

In many ways the vigorous jihad waged by the ghazis of the Tarsus region, like the burgeoning piratical fleets operating from Syrian and Cretan ports, were signs of the increased wealth and military capability available to freebooters and true believers of various stripes at the interface between the imperial and Islamic dominions.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 366–8. V. Christides, 'The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea. Piracy and Conquest', *Byzantion* 51 (1981), 78; V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984), 161.

<sup>68</sup> Kaminiates, §16, 48–9. Kazhdan views Kaminiates's account of the sack of Thessaloniki to be a fifteenth-century composition. See A. Kazhdan, 'Some Questions Addressed to the Scholars Who Believe in the Authenticity Of Kaminiates' "Capture of Thessalonica"', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 71 (1978): 301–14. His arguments have been convincingly refuted by P. Odorico, *Jean Caminiates, Eustathe de Thessalonique, Jean Anagnostès: Thessalonique, Chroniques d'une ville prise* (Toulouse, 2005), 14–24.

<sup>69</sup> Kaminiates, §17–18, 28–31.

<sup>70</sup> This is a low wall, built in the water of a harbour, designed to prevent ships from approaching the city sea walls. At Thessaloniki, it was being constructed from pagan tombstones. Cf. *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture*, tr. M. H. Morgan, 2nd ed. (New York, 1960) xi.xvi.9.

<sup>71</sup> *History of Al-Tabarī* 285 and 291 (Fields 38: 73 and 148).

<sup>72</sup> For a fuller account of Arab–Byzantine naval encounters under Leo VI, see A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1 (Brussels, 1950), 157–81.

<sup>73</sup> J. Shepard, 'Equilibrium to Expansion (886–1025)', in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 496.

Leo undoubtedly planned a two-pronged response, following his own counsel in the *Taktika* by launching retaliatory attacks by land and by sea.<sup>74</sup> Two prominent *strategoi*, Andronikos Doukas and Eustathios Argyros, were sent to the eastern frontier in reprisal for the 904 sack of Thessaloniki, achieving ‘numerous victories over the Hagarenes’,<sup>75</sup> including at Marash in 904, Tarsus in 905, and Aleppo in 906. The effect of these victories on Byzantine morale is visible in the polemical letter of Leo Choerosphaktes, which cited them as evidence of the virtues of Christianity over Islam.<sup>76</sup> The land attack stalled when Andronikos Doukas defected to Baghdad in 907, after being discovered in (or perhaps enticed into) a conspiracy against Leo VI.<sup>77</sup> He subsequently converted (or may have been forced to convert) to Islam, but died not long afterward, so that the Byzantine empire lost a successful and popular military leader.<sup>78</sup>

Leo also mounted a massive naval attack on Arab sea bases in Syria, Cyprus, and Crete. These campaigns were partly successful, but failed to regain Crete for the Byzantines. Among the bright spots in the naval record, Himerios, *logothete* of the fleet, won a brilliant victory over the Arabs in the Aegean in October of 905. He also had a decent run of raids on the Syrian coast in 910, but failed to take Crete in 911.<sup>79</sup> On the voyage home, however, Himerios and his imperial fleet were crushed by Leo of Tripoli and Damianos in a battle off the island of Chios in spring of 912.<sup>80</sup> He subsequently arrived in the capital city late in the spring of 912 after the death of Leo VI.

Leo VI died on 12 May 912, leaving the empire in the hands of his less capable brother Alexander. Leo has a mixed reputation among

<sup>74</sup> *Taktika*, Constitution 18, 138–40, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 980C–D. Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.130–122, pp. 486–8.

<sup>75</sup> Skylitzes 24.183; Cheynet, *Empereurs*, 155.

<sup>76</sup> R. J. H. Jenkins, ‘Leo Choerosphaktes and the Saracen Vizier’, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 8 (1963), 167–75; P. Karlin-Hayter, ‘Arethas, Choerosphaktes and the Saracen Vizir’, *Byzantion* 35 (1965) 475–81. The letter also cites the naval victory of Himerios in 906.

<sup>77</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 371.19–373.11; *Vita Euthymii*, 74.4–76.5; 78.28–31; 82.21–23, ed. P. Karlin-Hayter (Brussels, 1970). Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, ‘The Revolt of Andronicus Ducas’, *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), 23–25. D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968), 17–20. See also M. Canard, ‘Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques arabo-byzantines au X<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Bulletin des Études Orientales de l’Institut Français de Damas* 18/19 (1949–50), 51–69.

<sup>78</sup> For a fuller story, including bibliography and an account of the dating issues, see D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai*, 16–21.

<sup>79</sup> *De ceremoniis*, 651–664. R. J. H. Jenkins, ‘The Date of Leo VI’s Cretan Expedition’, *ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ εἰς Στίλπωνα Π. Κυριακίδη* (Thessaloniki, 1953), 277–81. For further discussion and relevant bibliography on whether the primary target of the 911 expedition was Crete or Syria, see J. Haldon, ‘Theory and Practice in Tenth-Century Military Administration. Chapters II, 44 and 45 of the *Book of Ceremonies*’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 13 (2000), 202 n.1 and 240–2.

<sup>80</sup> Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1, 196–216.

Byzantinists. Some have condemned him as incompetent in military affairs, because the historical record appears so dismal. For example, Vasiliev harshly declared that 'à l'époque de Léon VI ... la politique byzantine dans ce domaine a subi un échec complet'.<sup>81</sup> However, Patricia Karlin-Hayter, one of the staunchest defenders of Leo VI's military acumen, claims that he improved the Byzantine navy to the degree that it was able to counter Muslim naval aggression: 'The naval expeditions, for all the great losses, prevented the Mediterranean from being a Saracen lake. They did not prevent the Saracens from descending again and again in destructive raids. But the Saracens were unable to stop the Byzantines from doing much the same.'<sup>82</sup> Although the record appears bleak, it is true that Byzantium maintained a presence on the Mediterranean, forcing Muslim fleets to reckon with them, even if they could not prevent their depredations.

On the eastern frontier, too, a largely successful foreign policy obtained. Mark Whittow has noted that

The real achievement of the years between 871 and Leo VI's death in 912 are not to be found in the occasional long-distance raid to sack an Arab city ... but in the steady transformation of the frontier zone so that by 912 the Arabs had been pinned back behind the Taurus and Anti-Taurus, while at the same time the Armenian clans who dominated the mountains had been turned from clients of the Arabs into clients of the emperor.<sup>83</sup>

Tougher ascribed Leo's foreign policy challenges to bad luck,<sup>84</sup> while Karlin-Hayter concluded more positively, 'The overall balance is that some territory was added to the Empire, a number of small states were induced to enter more closely the Byzantine sphere of influence, conquests of the preceding reign were consolidated and the frontiers strengthened.'<sup>85</sup> This assessment seems, on the whole, accurate. More than what Leo did, however, what he wrote in the *Taktika* helped to reinforce Byzantine political identity as a Christian state engaged in a battle of great significance against a Muslim aggressor. The analysis that follows seeks to identify Leo's contribution in terms of Byzantine military morale and to uncover the message of the *Taktika* as a whole: that the way to revitalize military science was through a more deliberate articulation of Byzantine Christian identity,

<sup>81</sup> Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.1, 218.

<sup>82</sup> P. Karlin-Hayter, 'When Military Affairs Were in Leo's Hands', *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), 39.

<sup>83</sup> Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 314–15.

<sup>84</sup> Tougher, *Reign of Leo VI*, 166.

<sup>85</sup> Karlin-Hayter, 'Military Affairs', 29.

epitomized by the ideal general.<sup>86</sup> In the decades that followed his reign, the Byzantine empire flourished not only politically, but culturally, in what was to become a remarkable revival, due in part to the influence of this emperor who was known for his divine wisdom (σοφία) as well as the more classical virtue of ruling intelligence (φρονήσις).<sup>87</sup>

### Historiographical Scholarship

Modern scholarship of the Christian East typically embraces a bifurcated approach in that it produces either theological or historical studies, but few if any works that synthesize both. Although few would hesitate to affirm the inextricability of Islamic religion and politics, there is a curious reticence about these connections when it comes to Byzantium, despite its status as a closely related contemporary and indigenous Abrahamic religion of the Middle East. This book will argue that the same inextricability of faith and government existed for the Christian empire of the Byzantines. Contrary to Runciman's long-established thesis, first put forward in 1977, that the theocratic constitution of the Byzantine empire remained unchanged for 11 centuries,<sup>88</sup> this book intends to show that Leo VI, more than any other emperor before or after him, reshaped the ideals of 'the Byzantine theocracy' through his writing, his editorial choices, and the extent of his literary output.

This bifurcation of emphasis – an approach that explores either historical or theological themes but not usually both – holds true for published research on the highly unusual emperor Leo VI as well. There are only two studies of his reign, neither of which was intended to provide a comprehensive survey. The first was written more than a century ago by Nikolai Попов, *Императоръ Левъ VI. мудрый и его царствование въ церковно-историческомъ отношеніи* (*The emperor Leo VI the Wise and episcopal relations in his reign*) (Moscow, 1892). It was recently republished in Moscow in 2008, reflecting renewed interest in this era of Byzantine ecclesiastical history among a younger generation of Russian scholars. The second was written 20 years ago by S. Tougher, entitled *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997). This very useful study is generally descriptive and covers a broad range of political topics. While both

<sup>86</sup> See more detailed discussion of this in Chapter 4.

<sup>87</sup> On *sophia*, see J. Meyendorff, 'Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting Approaches to a Complex Theme', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), 391–401. On *phronesis*, see D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), 84–5.

<sup>88</sup> S. Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge, 1977).



of these works mention Leo's lengthy military manual, the *Taktika*, neither undertakes an in-depth look at the content or significance of the text, nor its theological arguments. Nor do they address in detail other literature attributed to Leo VI, like his legislation, his *Novellae*, or his particular exposition of the idea of the Byzantines as 'chosen people'.

However, scholars have to a large extent explored areas that do impinge directly on issues relevant to Leo's reign in the historical context of early medieval Byzantium. For example, contact between Byzantium and the Arabs has been extensively studied. Kennedy's work on *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* discusses social as well as political changes and is particularly useful in assessing differences between Byzantium and Islam during the period of the 'Abbasid caliphate and its tenth-century successors'.<sup>89</sup> Canard's studies on Arab–Byzantine relations explore military, commercial, and some religious contacts between the two powers.<sup>90</sup> El Cheikh has widened the scope with a general description of Arab views of Byzantium.<sup>91</sup> Mavroudi's study on the translation of a Greek dream book into Arabic and back into Greek reveals the mutual interests of ninth-century intellectuals in both the caliphate and Byzantium.<sup>92</sup> In an article on intellectual contact between Byzantium and the caliphate, Magdalino rather emphatically concludes that ninth-century intellectuals in Constantinople 'learned nothing from their encounter with the Arab world'.<sup>93</sup> John Meyendorff has briefly sketched Byzantine views of Islam from a theological perspective.<sup>94</sup> Sidney Griffith has analysed the apologetic writings of Arab Christians under the 'Abbasid caliphate, bringing to light the ways that Christians and Muslims countered one another's truth claims in the early ninth century.<sup>95</sup> Most studies have focused primarily

<sup>89</sup> H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 2nd edn (London, 2004).

<sup>90</sup> M. Canard, 'Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 35–56. See also D. Obolensky, 'Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges', in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des études byzantines*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1974) and N. Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles et le *Taktikon de l'Escorial*', in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des études byzantines*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1974).

<sup>91</sup> N. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

<sup>92</sup> M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and its Arabic sources* (Leiden, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> Paul Magdalino, 'The Road to Baghdad in the Thought-World of Ninth-Century Byzantium', in Leslie Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* (Aldershot, 1998), 195–213.

<sup>94</sup> J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine Views of Islam', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 113–32.

<sup>95</sup> S. H. Griffith, 'Byzantium and the Christians in the world of Islam', *Medieval Encounters* 3 (1997), 241–2; 'The Prophet Muhammad, His Scripture, and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century', in *La vie du prophète Mahomet* (Strasbourg, 1983), 99–146; 'Theodore Abu Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian

on diplomatic, commercial, or intellectual contact between the caliphate and Byzantium. Apart from Griffith, whose work focuses on solely Arabic sources, none appears to have considered theological differences, or how these may have affected other kinds of interaction. This study will focus on Byzantine sources, mainly in Greek, mining them for evidence of Byzantine attitudes towards Arabs, and in particular towards Arab observance of Islamic principles, contrasting them to Christian ideals of the same period. The analysis of Leo's military manual presented in the following chapters will show that the Byzantines drew stark distinctions between Christian and Islamic piety, and connected Byzantine Orthodoxy – especially where the emperor was concerned – with success in warfare. However, the connection between religion and military practices in Byzantium inevitably turns scholars to discussions of holy war.

Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki's extensive 1991 study sees in Byzantium a unique brand of holy war, different to Western Crusades or Islamic *jihad*, yet nonetheless holy war. It rests on 'this *Kaiseridee* ... [whence] originates the competence of the emperor to proclaim such a "holy war", a war that was a political and not an ecclesiastical affair, as it was in the medieval west'.<sup>96</sup> As this study will show, holy war may indeed rest on a valid *Kaiseridee*, but this was not the case in Byzantium, where no emperor had the spiritual authority to issue such a call to arms. Kolia-Dermitzaki connects the Byzantine *Kaiseridee* with the authority to proclaim holy war, which she defines as offensive, despite the Byzantines' own view of these wars as defensive. The definition of holy war is in fact so different to what the Byzantines pursued that she has to change it to resemble Byzantine practice more closely in order to apply the term to Byzantium. Her book is interesting because it is the only full-length study of Byzantine 'holy war', but she does not attempt any assessment of the effectiveness of the concept in terms of military success. Even her 2012 reassessment of these ideas, focused primarily on making a comparison between Western Crusades and the military actions of the Byzantines, concludes that since there is

Writer of the First Abbasid Century' (Tel Aviv University: annual lecture, 1992); see also Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter, Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau, 1930); S. Pines, 'Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem Kalam and to Jewish Thought', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 5 (1976), 115.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine 'Holy War': The Idea and Propagation of Religious War in Byzantium* (Athens, 1991), 187f. See the later development of her thought in A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War" in Byzantium Twenty Years Later', in J. Koder and I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion, Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)* (Vienna, 2012): 121–32.

no widespread agreement on the very definition of holy war, it is difficult to assign the label to Byzantium. However, her analysis provides a lucid account not only of the variations in definition offered by well-known scholars, but also a nuanced description of Byzantine warfare as a 'particular kind of Holy War [that is a] subcategory of Just War'.<sup>97</sup> This application of Tyerman's dictum that 'all holy wars are just, but not all just wars are holy'<sup>98</sup> is interesting, but assumes the truth of the dictum; on the contrary, it can be shown that some holy wars are entirely unjust. Even Tyerman notes that 'Byzantine warfare remained a secular activity, for all its divine sanction, never a penitential act of religious votaries.'<sup>99</sup> The present study, while disagreeing with Kolia-Dermitzaki that the Byzantines practised even a sort of holy war, will analyse not how Byzantium pursued war but why and what impact their religion had on Byzantine militarized politics.<sup>100</sup>

Those scholars less focused on religion have customarily approached Byzantine military history from a purely functional perspective, studying its development,<sup>101</sup> organization,<sup>102</sup> logistics,<sup>103</sup> and

<sup>97</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, '“Holy War” in Byzantium Twenty Years Later', 132. Haldon also does not see holy war as a Byzantine category, *Commentary*, 367.

<sup>98</sup> C. Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (London, 2007). Tyerman's definition of just war is conditioned on a view of justice according to the warrior who fights it, but this seems dubious because it makes an absolute concept function in an arbitrary way.

<sup>99</sup> Tyerman, *God's War*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Related studies include J.-Cl. Cheynet, 'La guerre sainte à Byzance au moyen Âge: un malentendu', in D. Baloup and P. Josserand (eds.), *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte. Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin (XIe–XIIIe siècle), Colloque international de la Casa de Velásquez, Madrid 11–13 avril 2005* (Toulouse, 2006): 13–32; T. Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire' *Byzantion* 68 (1998), 194–221; V. Laurent, 'L'idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantine' *Revue historique du sud-est européen* 23 (1946), 71–98; N. Oikonomides, 'The Concept of "Holy War" and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivorys', in T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1995), 62–86; G. Michaelides-Nouaros, 'Ο δίκαιος πόλεμος κατά τὰ Τακτικά Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ', in *Σύμμικτα Σεφεριάδου* (Athens, 1961), 41–34; M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

<sup>101</sup> E. McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors* (Toronto, 2000); Magdalino, 'The Non-Judicial Legislation of Leo VI'; James Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), 75–100.

<sup>102</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Studies in the Organisation of the Byzantine Army*; W. Treadgold, 'Notes on the Numbers and Organisation of the Ninth-century Byzantine Army', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21 (1980), 269–88; J. Haldon, 'The Organisation and Support of an Expeditionary Force: Manpower and Logistics in the Middle Byzantine Period', in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)* (Athens, 1997), 111–51.

<sup>103</sup> J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (London, 1999), 99–106; J. Haldon, 'Theory and Practice'. On the Roman road network and its use for the army, see J. Haldon, 'Roads and Communications in the Byzantine Empire: Wagons, Horses, and Supplies', in John Pryor (ed.), *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades: Proceedings of a Workshop*

financing.<sup>104</sup> Others have examined the daily operations and discipline of the Byzantine army but they have most often taken a comparative approach that assesses differences to the pagan Roman past, simply noting the religious symbols related to Byzantine practice, but not analysing their theological significance in any detail.<sup>105</sup> Others have delineated military prayers and liturgies, noting the ways in which these practices aligned with Eastern Orthodox Christianity, without discussing how these patterns contrasted with other religious traditions.<sup>106</sup> Developments in tactics and strategy to explain the victories of the tenth century have been explored by Alphonse Dain,<sup>107</sup> Gilbert Dagron,<sup>108</sup> and, more recently, George Dennis<sup>109</sup> and Eric McGeer,<sup>110</sup> but this is only one part of the picture. Tactics, however well designed, do not work if soldiers are unwilling to execute them. Like city walls, military strategy no matter how expertly constructed will fail if soldiers cannot be induced to put their lives on the line without giving way to fear.

Beyond this, John Haldon has written at length on the Byzantine army and its recruitment practices, use of technology, and tax-based funding, thus exploring how the Byzantine army solved typical military problems

*held at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 30 Sep-4 Oct 2002* (Aldershot, 2006), 131–58; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1997), 92–124; D. H. French, 'The Roman Road-System of Asia Minor' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 7.2 (1980), 698–729; D. H. French, 'A Road Problem: Roman or Byzantine?', *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 43 (1993), 445–54. For some useful data on army supplies in an earlier period, see J. P. Roth, *The Logistics of the Roman Army at War (264 BC–AD 235)* (Leiden, 1999), 16–67.

<sup>104</sup> W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine State Finances in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (New York, 1982), 51. Although the Byzantine empire allocated approximately 69 per cent of its annual budget to military expenditures, according to Treadgold, it apparently could not afford to pay its regular soldiers a living wage. Cf. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284–1081* (Redwood City, CA, 1995), 197.

<sup>105</sup> J.-R. Vieillefond, 'Les pratiques religieuses dans l'armée byzantine d'après les traités militaires', *Revue des études anciennes* 36 (1935), 322–30; P. Goubert, 'Religion et superstitions dans l'armée byzantine à la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Orientalia christiana periodica* 13 (1947), 495–500.

<sup>106</sup> Y. Stoyanov, 'Eastern Orthodox Christianity', in G. M. Reichberg and H. Syse (eds.), *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (Cambridge, 2014), 164–234.

<sup>107</sup> A. Dain, 'Inventaire raisonné des cents manuscrits des 'constitutions tactiques' de Léon VI le sage' *Scriptorium* 1 (1946), 33–49; A. Dain and J.-A. Foucault, 'Les stratégestes byzantins' *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 317–92.

<sup>108</sup> G. Dagron and H. Mihaescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris, 1986).

<sup>109</sup> G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, DC, 1985).

<sup>110</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*. He mentions morale only twice, once in a description of the silence of the advance of the heavy cavalry (p. 302), and twice briefly while discussing the inspirational piety of Nikephoros II Phokas (pp. 326–7, 364).

like manpower, training, and budgets.<sup>111</sup> He has also investigated Byzantine attitudes towards warfare.<sup>112</sup> His essay on diplomacy and warfare, or ‘blood and ink’, observes that ‘Byzantine culture developed no theory of warfare as a necessary element in its ideological self-image’.<sup>113</sup> Haldon argues that this was the case because elites in Constantinople were more influential in defining that self-image than were the frontier warriors and magnate clans who led the army. In a thought-provoking chapter titled ‘Fighting for peace: attitudes toward warfare in Byzantium’, he touches on the general themes of this study. There he argues for a political justification of warfare that characterized it as ‘a struggle between good and evil, between Christianity and its enemies’, yet does not qualify as a specific doctrine of holy war.<sup>114</sup> He goes on to explore how Byzantium’s religio-political values were realized in practice, in terms of how they affected Byzantine strategy on the battlefield. In his 2014 *Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI*, Haldon also addresses some of the features of Leo VI’s ideological approach to military writing.<sup>115</sup>

Because it is the contention of this book that religion has been undertheorized in Byzantium, this study will put the accent more on religious principles and less on military tactics, in order to examine more closely the development and employment of Byzantine values in the context of conflict. I will argue that Byzantium forged a new self-identity as a distinctively Christian empire during the tenth century, creatively combining the Constantinian legacy of military victory and Christian faith in a new way that suited their changed circumstances, particularly at crisis points where the political survival of an emperor with tenuous authority was at stake.

In a groundbreaking 1986 study, Michael McCormick examined the significance of the Byzantine *Kaiseridee*, arguing that ‘triumphal ceremonial, propaganda and public display celebrated and confirmed the

<sup>111</sup> J. Haldon, *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army c.550–950* (Vienna, 1979). Haldon, ‘Some Aspects of Byzantine Military Technology from the Sixth to the Tenth Centuries’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1 (1975), 11–47; Haldon, ‘Military Service, Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993), 1–67.

<sup>112</sup> J. Haldon, ‘“Blood and Ink”: Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes Towards Warfare and Diplomacy’, in Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* (Aldershot, 1992). He also discusses ideology and warfare in *Warfare, State and Society*, 13–34.

<sup>113</sup> Haldon, ‘Blood and Ink’, 292.

<sup>114</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 22–38. This is a deft summary of the argument of my 2010 doctoral thesis, cited by Haldon (n. 54, 55) and citing much of the same literature, and expanded to include scholarship published after 2010.

victorious rulership of the emperor'.<sup>116</sup> He sees the Byzantine imperial concept as one rooted in a pagan belief in Roman eternal victory, but does not consider the ways in which this idea was transformed in Byzantium and adapted from a pagan Roman idea into an equally universal Christian worldview. As this monograph will show, God and not the emperor was the focus of tenth-century triumphal celebrations, partly because Leo VI, Romanos I, and Constantine VII were not soldiers (and all had issues of legitimacy to contend with) and partly because the emperor's power was not absolute but subject to limits imposed on him by the patriarch, even in military matters. Basil II appears to have dealt with the latter problem simply by not appointing a patriarch for several years (980–4) during his reign. The emergence in the middle Byzantine era of non-imperial (usually military) participants in triumphal celebrations, while interesting, neglects the critical if subsidiary role of the patriarch and thus the importance of the Church and the Orthodox Christian faith as the source of legitimation. The development of liturgies with prayers for imperial victory does not show Byzantine views on victory so much as the distinctive Byzantine embrace of Orthodox Christian religion.

Bissera Pentcheva has recently published an insightful study on the military qualities of the Mother of God in Byzantium.<sup>117</sup> She has demonstrated that Theotokos icons were adapted to serve in the context of war, both on the battlefield as a sign of victory and in conjunction with military saints. Her study combines religion, politics, and art, and the crux of her argument is that 'the Virgin Mary and the warrior saints upheld the imperial theory of power based on victories in battle'.<sup>118</sup> In other words, the icons of Mary were associated with the ancient Victory, and therefore gave legitimacy to the emperor-generals of the tenth century. The study is thorough and interesting, but sees the significance of the religious iconography the wrong way round. Byzantine emperors did not receive legitimacy because they were victorious, as Pentcheva has argued, but because they were seen as blessed by God. Victory was one obvious way to determine God's approval, but the problem of Byzantine sin, not imperial illegitimacy, was

<sup>116</sup> McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 5. This idea was first analysed by Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee im höfischen Zeremoniell* (Jena, 1938) and for the earlier classical period, see W. Ensslin, 'Gottkaiser und Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden', *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Abteilung* (Munich, 1942).

<sup>117</sup> B. V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006).

<sup>118</sup> Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 69.

more likely to be considered the cause of defeat.<sup>119</sup> As a *strategos* and bringer of victory, Mary was powerful because she was the progenitor of Christ, who brings life through love and sacrifice. As such, Christ is the model martyr-soldier for Byzantines, and this image is powerfully brought forward by the use of battle standards and icons of crosses. Mary's importance is therefore derivative; her power comes from her virginal motherhood, not from her personal virtue. The necessary framework for the power of Marian iconography is that of basic Orthodox Christian doctrine, but this has yet to be worked out comprehensively. Recent research into the relationship between text and art points to a consistent animating system of belief that guided the creation of religious icons generally in Byzantium, but how this worked for military icons needs further study.<sup>120</sup>

Mark Whittow in his thoughtful book *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* argues that 'the survival of Constantinople in the face of Arab attack and their continued membership of an empire ruled from Constantinople was important because their hope of salvation depended upon it'.<sup>121</sup> Although he presents a persuasive picture of the central ecclesiastical authority of the patriarch over bishops in the provinces, he does not present any evidence for his assertion that Byzantines believed their spiritual salvation was contingent upon the safety of the capital city. His analysis treats only the political function of the Church, explicitly the union of Church and state in the authority of emperor and patriarch. What is lacking from this approach is consideration of the deeper implications of Orthodox theology and specifically in terms of the distinctively theological Byzantine worldview.

The most important study that impinges on the interplay of politics and religion remains Gilbert Dagron's brilliantly subtle *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, which argues that the nature of the imperial office was not only political but sacerdotal, and therefore presented difficulties because of inherent theological tensions between Church and palace.<sup>122</sup> The Byzantine emperor was viewed as an Old Testament David *redivivus*, a priest in the order of Melchizedek, and therefore the possessor of acute spiritual power.<sup>123</sup> However, Dagron

<sup>119</sup> George the Monk attributes Byzantine defeat not to the emperor's military failures, but to his impiety, showing that theological considerations trumped political ones. C. De Boor (ed.), *Georgii Monachi Chronicon* (Stuttgart, 1904), 2: 699.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. L. James (ed.), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>121</sup> Whittow, *Making*, 126.

<sup>122</sup> G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003). Originally published in French as *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le 'césaropapisme' byzantin* (Paris, 1996).

<sup>123</sup> Melchizedek – whose name (מלכי זדק) literally means 'my king is righteousness' – was an Old Testament king and pre-levitical priest who blessed Abraham (then Abram) in Gen 14:18 and was

notes, ‘an emperor was nothing if he was not everything, and in particular if he was not the providential mediator between his people and God.’<sup>124</sup> The distinctively Byzantine problem of ‘the quasi-episcopal sacrality of a sovereign’ has direct influence on the authority of an innovative military manual, as well as the Byzantine embrace of the self-image propagated by Leo VI and his successors.<sup>125</sup>

### Primary Sources and Methodology

The source materials studied in this monograph have thus been chosen for their ideological content across a range of genres: court ceremonial (*Kletorologion*), military strategy (*Taktika*), civil legislation (*Novellae*), and ecclesiastical authority (canon law, homilies, and scripture). The texts that have been chosen for this investigation are examined for common ideas and shared language. Ideas routinely found in Leo VI’s worldview include a conviction that Christianity is the one true religion, that Islam is a false religion, that the God of the Christians is sovereign over everything (including military conflict) and will eventually be vindicated by the events of history as the one true God and conqueror over all. In the legislation particularly, one finds Leo’s view that the children of this one true God ought to live in a way that honours the divine, obeys the church, and presents a visible orthodoxy to others.

These ideas are rooted in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and the Old Testament in particular, which Byzantium read in the Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX).<sup>126</sup> This biblically shaped worldview evinces itself in the shared language of Byzantine writers, who, regardless of their education or social status, demonstrate an awareness of their identity as inheritors of the Old Testament status of ‘chosen people’.<sup>127</sup> Because the Septuagint provides the metanarrative of their collective identity, it forms a crucial part of Byzantine self-understanding. It is through the stories,

thereafter invoked as the precursor of Jesus Christ as king and non-leitical priest in the New Testament (cf. Heb 7:1–18).

<sup>124</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 113.

<sup>125</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 309–10.

<sup>126</sup> The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament begun in the third century BC in Alexandria by 70 (or 72) translators, according to legend, hence the abbreviation LXX to indicate the text. It includes many books which are considered deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic church, but the inspiration of these books was challenged by Jerome and John of Damascus.

<sup>127</sup> Whittow, *Making*, 161–5.



laws, and ideals of the Old Testament that Byzantines made sense of their world.<sup>128</sup> This study will identify biblical source materials, both ideas and direct quotations, where they occur in the primary sources, showing how the Christian worldview and language of Byzantium permeates the culture and provides the key for decoding the impact and significance of religious ideologies in the early medieval period.

Using biblical language or quotations was an integral part of demonstrating a text's congruence with authoritative norms and ideals. The usual practice of modern interpreters has been to discard the religious language as chaff, almost as superficial cultural 'noise', while seeking a kernel of useful (i.e. non-theological) historical material. However, for a Byzantine, the core presence of religious vocabulary and biblical allusion gave weight and validity to the content of a book. Crucially, these things also gave authority and acceptability to the author of a given text. This legitimacy was sought even (or perhaps chiefly) by emperors eager to demonstrate their divine chosenness, since imperial authority was bestowed in a variety of ways in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>129</sup> That is to say, with so many varied protocols for legitimating imperial authority such as hereditary succession or divine anointing or popular acclamation, other means became necessarily important. What better source for proving legitimacy than the religion shared by all (or at least most) of the populace?<sup>130</sup> In many ways, even until the end of Byzantium, 'religion was the politics of the Byzantine people.'<sup>131</sup>

In a pre-modern state such as the Byzantine empire, political boundaries were not the differentiating factor, nor could mere geography determine one's loyalties. Difference was marked, rather, in the realm of religion. It was a category that transcended race and language and incarnated the unity of the Byzantine polis. That is not to say that there were not numerous and heated differences among Christians of varying christological beliefs, but

<sup>128</sup> For a discussion of apocrypha and their role in the Byzantine world view, see J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. 99–112.

<sup>129</sup> Dagron considers Macedonian-era imperial authority granted through a 'legitimacy of rupture' (for usurpers) as well as a 'legitimacy of continuity' (for porphyrogeneti). Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 35.

<sup>130</sup> In assessing the impact of Orthodox Christianity in Byzantium, I am in agreement with Tia Kolbaba, who concludes her study on East/West religious differences by showing that 'religion and the rest of society are inseparable, and . . . the debate about religion versus other factors is sterile' (T. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Chicago, 2000) 171).

<sup>131</sup> D. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1979), 6.

by far the more distinct boundary was the overarching one of religion. A person in the ninth century was, above all else, either a pagan, or a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Christian. Distinctions within religious groups are as numerous as the members of that group, but the lines were clear between the different religions. It is in this sense that religious language is used therefore as a distinguishing mark, a linguistic signpost that identified the writer as 'one of us'.<sup>132</sup> It was not a mere social convention, but a sign of genuine 'Byzantine-ness' that revealed a shared cultural outlook. In the language of anthropology, their common experience 'shaped the spiritual consciousness' of the Byzantines.<sup>133</sup>

The methodological approach for this analysis bears some resemblances to the theory of redaction criticism, developed by New Testament biblical scholars in the mid twentieth century.<sup>134</sup> This theory considers the authors of the four canonical Gospels to be 'creative thinkers rather than unimaginative cut-and-paste people'.<sup>135</sup> In the same way, the argument of this book presents Leo VI as an independent thinker to a degree not usually associated with Byzantine authors, who were generally well known for having a horror of innovation. However, Leo's approach to editing the literature of his day might be said to bear the marks of a redaction critic, perhaps even shading into narrative criticism, which focuses on the author as something of an artist who shapes his material for an underlying theological purpose. One might go so far as to say that Byzantine studies already employs an approach similar to the approach of social location theory, used by New Testament scholars, because Byzantinists often query the reception of historical texts by readers. To a certain extent, the argument of this book examines the redaction and creation of literature by Leo VI through the lens of his social location as a religiously educated emperor facing aggression from without as well as the usual insurrections from within.

<sup>132</sup> J. Shepard has suggested that further exploration of the extent to which the Greek language itself comprised a Byzantine circle of influence would be fruitful. This monograph has less ambitiously chosen a subset of that circle for examination, i.e. religious language. Cf. Shepard, 'Byzantium's Overlapping Circles', in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Vol. I: Plenary Papers* (Aldershot, 2006), 16.

<sup>133</sup> C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966, reprinted 2004) 28. This essay discusses how religion does not merely interpret reality, but shapes it on a cultural scale.

<sup>134</sup> Personal communication with C. K. Rowe, Professor of New Testament, Duke Divinity School, 31 July 2015.

<sup>135</sup> M. Goodacre, 'Redaction criticism', in Paula Gooder (ed.), *Searching for Meaning. An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (Louisville, 2008), 38–46, at 39.

## Plan of Argument

The argument of this book seeks to join together previous research, particularly that of Dagron and Haldon, with consciously ideological texts attributed to Leo VI, in order to examine the thought-world of early medieval Byzantium under the lens of religion. In so doing, this study must reckon with what Anthony Cutler has called a ‘process of sedimentation – the accumulation of layers of meaning the very weight of which served to convert the original stratum of significance [which is] more obvious between the ninth and the eleventh century than in the following era’.<sup>136</sup> This book is particularly concerned to illuminate the influence of ideology on imperial thinking. Averil Cameron has recently remarked that ‘as long as religious language and theological rhetoric in Byzantine texts remain so understudied and undertheorized, they will continue to be accepted at face value, or conversely, ignored as irrelevant’.<sup>137</sup> This comment describes a problem rarely addressed by Byzantinists, although some new work is beginning to be published.<sup>138</sup> The problem thus far is that religious language has been either uncritically accepted, or, more often, it has been dismissed as irrelevant. However, more detailed study, and indeed, some attempt at theorizing the uses and abuses of this religious language will help to lift our scholarly understanding of the theological context of Byzantium beyond the usual caricature of ‘an exotic and unchanging other’.<sup>139</sup>

Chapters 2–4 of this book concern the *Taktika* (τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδωσις) of Leo VI. As a military manual written, unusually, by an author with no military experience and also the first manual to consider explicitly the military threat posed by Muslims, Leo’s book presents some new and fascinating material.<sup>140</sup> It uses older material in ways designed to exploit an original consideration of the connection between religion and politics. Previous studies have approached the ideological divide as a purely political one, but Leo’s *Taktika* indicates that the

<sup>136</sup> A. Cutler, ‘Πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραήλ: Ezekiel and the Politics of Resurrection in Tenth-Century Byzantium’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), 47.

<sup>137</sup> A. Cameron, ‘The Very Model of Orthodoxy?’, in her *Byzantine Matters*, 111.

<sup>138</sup> C. Rapp, A. Külzer, Ch. Gastgeber (eds.), *The Bible in Byzantium: Text and Experience* (Göttingen, forthcoming 2018); D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (eds.), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2016); Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2010).

<sup>139</sup> Magdalino and Nelson, *Old Testament in Byzantium*, 111.

<sup>140</sup> For a different view, see I. Eramo (ed.), *Siriano. Discorsi di Guerra* (Bari, 2010), 14–23. On the contested date of Syrianos *magistros*, see P. Rance, ‘The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister (formerly the Sixth-Century Anonymus Byzantinus)’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100.2 (2007), 701–37.

Byzantines also viewed it as a religious struggle. The earlier manual of the emperor-general Maurikios (r. 582–602) considers how to fight enemies of various ethnicities, but Leo is the first to consider an enemy identified primarily by religion and only secondarily by ethnicity, and his work was to have far-reaching influence in the military engagements of the tenth century.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, in his epilogue, Leo added a new and explicitly theological approach to making war that became the definitive framework for the reconquest of eastern lands in the tenth century.

**Chapter 5** surveys the range and scope of Leo's unusually large legal corpus, noting where he produced new legislation or transformed old legislation. It addresses the social context of his laws, where known, and compares Leo's legislation with similar earlier legal material. This chapter argues that Leo's specific approach to law-making included a four-point plan for the updates and purification he wanted to achieve: new laws are justified on the basis primarily that Byzantium is a Christian empire, and as such ought to be ruled by divine law, interpreted through the God-ordained emperor. Leo therefore pursues a legislative agenda that preserves good laws, invalidates old ones, affirms contemporary customs as laws, and creates entirely new laws now necessary for the flourishing of a Christian polity.

**Chapter 6** attends to the theological prolegomena of Leo's *Novels*, because they generally reveal his motivations for the new laws he is promulgating. This chapter analyses the content of these novels with a view towards understanding what Leo's religious language reveals about his perspective on Christian rulership and corporate identity of all members of the *oikumene* under his pastoral care and divine fatherly protection.

**Chapter 7** examines Leo as a homilist, because he is unique for the number as well as the content of his 42 extant sermons. The historical context of these compositions and their content will be surveyed in this chapter, and some commentary offered on the imperial political ideology they reveal. In particular, they tie religious observance to civil obedience, and draw on Old Testament exegesis to justify these exhortations.

**Chapter 8** explores the well-known but little examined conviction held by the Byzantines that they were the 'chosen people' written about in the Hebrew scriptures. This self-image affected their exegesis of the Septuagint

<sup>141</sup> The anonymous author of the manual known as the *Rhetorica militaris* discussed shared religion (both Christian and pagan) as a means to raise morale among soldiers. However, the dating of the manual is uncertain; proposed dates range from the sixth to the tenth centuries. See further discussion in **Chapter 3**.

and New Testament, and formed their political identity. Little has been written on the 'chosen people' concept comparing Christian and Jewish theological beliefs. This chapter will argue that middle Byzantine culture – based on the notion of sacred order, that is, *taxis* or *eutaxia* – shaped the emperor Leo VI, who in turn promulgated this ideal of the Byzantines as chosen people. Analysis of the vocabulary used by Leo VI, particularly concerning his own 'chosenness' as the Solomonic son of a 'new David', echoes scriptural terminology and will help to theorize his new approach to the notion of 'chosenness' among the Byzantines by demonstrating how the faith of the emperor ensured the safety and flourishing of the citizens of the *oikoumene* as the people of God. Indeed, Leo VI implicitly enriched the ideal of Orthodox Christians as chosen people by explicitly asserting his own divine chosenness, appealing to earlier canonical decrees regarding correct behaviour for a Christian *politeia*, and expanding Orthodox political identity to include an appropriation of the Old Testament history of the people of Israel, whose bellicose God saved his chosen people from all danger and ensured victory over their enemies.

Finally, Chapter 9 focuses on Byzantine Christian statecraft and offers a conclusion, including the impact of these works in the tenth century, and proposing a new trajectory for thinking about Byzantium as a Christian polity in the early medieval period. In a delightfully provocative way, Anthony Kaldellis has noted that 'in Byzantine studies, ideology is largely drawn from texts, and it is rarely brought into the analysis of political history.'<sup>142</sup> This is precisely what this book is intended to do: analyse the political history of Leo VI by means of investigating his ideology as expressed in his decisions and reflected in his writings. In so doing, one's understanding of this much-maligned emperor and his contribution to the political and religious identity of the middle Byzantine *oikoumene* may thus be enriched.

<sup>142</sup> Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

*Romans Imitating Saracens?*

Leo VI was unexpected, unlikely, and unusual. A second son of doubtful paternity, he received a religious and scholarly education, earning the epithet ‘the Wise’ in his own lifetime.<sup>1</sup> When his older brother Constantine died in 879, Leo became heir apparent, but never fully gained his father’s confidence; indeed, he was accused of plotting an overthrow and was imprisoned for treason in 883. Basil I had a change of heart eventually and restored him to public honour on 21 July 886. Six weeks later, after Basil’s death in a hunting accident, Leo found himself the sole ruler of the empire.

Upon his accession, Leo deposed the patriarch Photios, and replaced him with the emperor’s 19-year-old brother, despite canon law stipulating 25 as the minimum age for a patriarch.<sup>2</sup> He also promoted the court official who had prevented Basil I from blinding him, Stylianos Zaoutzes, to a very high office created expressly for him: *basileopator*.<sup>3</sup> Then he reburied Michael III in the Church of the Holy Apostles in a move possibly intended ‘to atone for the crime of his dynasty’, that is, Basil I’s murder of Michael III.<sup>4</sup> What followed was a reign characterized by extraordinary confidence, determined dynasty-building, ideological propaganda, and a passion for legislation. Even texts not normally considered legal material, such as his military manual (*Taktika*) and precedence list (*Kletorologion*),

<sup>1</sup> On Leo’s education, see the contemporary source *Vita Theophanous* in E. Kurtz, ‘Zwei griechischen Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI’, *Mémoires de l’Académie Impériale de St.-Petersbourg* (St Petersburg, 1898), 3: 1–24, esp. 14.16–17.

<sup>2</sup> Daphnopates, Letter 2.45.56–57, in J. Darrouzès and L. G. Westerink (eds.), *Daphnopates Correspondance* (Paris, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> I. Bekker (ed.), *Georgius Monachus*, *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae* (Bonn, 1838), 847. See P. Karlin-Hayter (ed.), *Vita Euthymii* (Brussels, 1970), 11.5, 6–7. This office was later claimed by Romanos I Lekapenos, the usurper who took imperial control from Leo VI’s young son, Constantine VII, in 917.

<sup>4</sup> Bekker, *Georgius Monachus*, 849. S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 63.

were intended by the emperor to carry the weight of imperial legislation, as their *proiimia* show.<sup>5</sup> Predictably, Leo wanted most of what he wrote to be accepted as imperial instruction, not suggestion, and the language of obligation he uses makes this clear.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter argues that the *Taktika* was not the mere arbitrary inspiration of a scholarly emperor, but grew out of a ninth-century cultural milieu in which anti-Muslim polemic had flourished for two generations. It represents both continuity with ninth-century anti-Islamism and innovation in terms of its admiration for the successful translation of Islamic religious observance into effective military practice. Although they are very different religions, Leo VI daringly chose to recommend a careful sort of mimesis of Arab Muslim practice for Byzantine Christian soldiers in order to effect a change in the momentum of Christian–Muslim warfare. He drew upon a deep cultural commitment to the superiority of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity, showing a new way to regain military effectiveness in the opposition of ideologies. His stated goal was to turn the tide, despite setbacks, and renew Byzantine military strategic thinking.<sup>7</sup> He was able to do far more than that, as his successors carried forward and developed his ideas, leading to the unprecedented reconquest of formerly Byzantine lands in the tenth century. This analysis of Leo's approach traces the origin of his thinking, places it in its cultural, intellectual, and historical context, and explores new ways of interpreting its significance.

Unusual among Byzantine texts of the era, Leo's *Taktika* reveals an author keenly aware of growing Arab sea power that threatened to turn the Mediterranean into a 'Saracen lake' as well as the ongoing danger of continual frontier raids.<sup>8</sup> The urgency of the text arises from an increasingly troublesome pincer movement of Islamic forces that approached Byzantium both by land and by sea, and reflects the polemic of the ninth century. Some features of that polemic reveal Christian writers, such as Niketas Byzantios, concerned about the military threat from Byzantium's

<sup>5</sup> *Taktika*, Prologue 6 and 9 refer to the manual as 'another *Procheiros Nomos*'. N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles: introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire* (Paris, 1972), 28. Some internal evidence for Leo's involvement in the production of the text is also present; for example, the office of *basileopator*, invented not long before by Leo, is listed.

<sup>6</sup> P. Magdalino, 'The Non-Juridical Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI', in S. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 169–82; J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études sur Léon VI', *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), 229.

<sup>7</sup> *Taktika*, Prologue 3. G. T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, revised ed. (Washington, DC, 2014), 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> P. Karlin-Hayter, 'When Military Affairs Were in Leo's Hands', *Traditio* 23 (1967), 15–40; reprinted in *Studies in Byzantine Political History* (London, 1981), xiii.

neighbour and, in rhetoric characteristic of the genre, describe the threat in largely inaccurate but extreme terms.<sup>9</sup>

The *Taktika* focuses the attitudes of Byzantine Christians vis-à-vis Islam and, for the first time in Byzantine history, presents a solution for the military threat posed by the caliphate. In doing this, Leo combines the exigencies of battle with the doctrines of Christianity and casts the conflict in broader terms of religious distinction over against mere political or ethnic difference to a higher degree than did his main source Maurice (r. 582–602), who wrote a military manual during the war with the Persians. Leo's desire to revivify knowledge of the military arts indicates an implicit acknowledgement that in the ninth century the Muslims held the initiative in terms of battle readiness. Leo sought to overturn this advantage, addressing every aspect of army campaigns on land as well as naval campaigns, discussing the latter in an unusual text without certain precedent in the Byzantine military canon.

### Manuscripts and Critical Editions

The first English translation and critical edition of the *Taktika* has only recently appeared.<sup>10</sup> Previous critical editions are nearly a century old and are incomplete.<sup>11</sup> The full text in Greek is exceedingly long, taking up 224 double-column large pages in the nineteenth-century *Patrologia Graeca* edition, from which scholars were obliged to work until Dennis's 2010 edition appeared.<sup>12</sup> Dennis's edition, at 643 pages of Greek facing English, reveals even more clearly the massive length of Leo's text. There is a Latin translation of the sixteenth century,<sup>13</sup> a French and a German translation of the eighteenth century (both with commentaries),<sup>14</sup> and several partial

<sup>9</sup> All three of Niketas's works are published in *Patrologia Graeca* 105.669–806 (refutatio), 807–21 (first epistolary reply), 821–42 (second epistolary reply). For more on this, see Riedel, 'Fighting the good fight: the "Taktika" of Leo VI and its influence on Byzantine cultural identity', unpublished DPhil dissertation (University of Oxford, 2010), 54–76. Haldon, *Commentary*, 367–9 and 375–6 (on enemies of the faith). Cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Killing at God's Command: Niketas of Byzantium's Polemic against Islam and the Christian Tradition of Divinely Sanctioned Murder', *Al-Masāq* 16.1 (2004): 163–76.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI* (originally published in 2010). For the accompanying commentary, see J. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> R. Vári (ed.), *Taktika I–XIV*, 38, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1917–22); R. Vári (ed.), *Taktika I–XVIII*, in G. Pauler and S. Szilagyí, *A Magyar Honfoglalás Kútjöi* (Budapest, 1900), 11–89.

<sup>12</sup> J. P. Migne (ed.), *Leonis imperatoris Tactica*, *Patrologia Graeca* 107 (Paris, 1863), col. 669–1120.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin translation in *Patrologia Graeca* 107 edited by Migne reproduces that of Johannes Chécus (Basel, 1554).

<sup>14</sup> Paul-Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy published a French translation (Paris, 1758) under the title *Institutions militaires de l'empereur Léon*. This translation has been reprinted in F. C. Liskenne and J. B. B. Sauvan (eds.), *Bibliothèque historique et militaire*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1778), 3: 437–552. I. W.



translations into various languages, primarily focused on Constitution 19 because of its apparently unique subject matter on naval warfare.<sup>15</sup>

The Greek text survives in two recensions, the *Laurentianus* LV-4, dated to the mid tenth century, and the *Ambrosianus* B 119-sup. (139), dated to the late tenth or early eleventh century. A third recension dated to the eleventh century also survives, but as a later version, and thus will not be used here. The Laurentian manuscript (M) is the basis of the 2010 Dennis edition and the 2014 Haldon commentary, while the *Patrologia Graeca* preserves the Ambrosian recension. The Ambrosian text appears to be a paraphrase of the Laurentian and bears physical evidence of heavy use, while the Dennis edition follows the Laurentian text, a luxury manuscript.<sup>16</sup> In the Laurentian text, Constitutions 15, 17, and 19 are found after the Epilogue, giving rise to speculation that these sections were written after the book was finished and later integrated into the final (Ambrosian) text. The Laurentian text, probably copied for the imperial library of Constantine VII, has no manuscript descendants until the fifteenth century, a lack that indicates its sequestered existence among rarely touched imperial manuscripts.<sup>17</sup> It was taken as plunder during the sack of Constantinople by the armies of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and from there passed through the hands of several owners before its acquisition by the cloister of San Lorenzo at Florence in 1521, where it remains today. Because it is more likely to be closer to the original text, it is the basis for Dennis's 2010 critical edition, although he does say that 'on occasion, when M [Laurentian text] is faulty or lacking, A [the Ambrosian text] provides the correct reading.'<sup>18</sup> Haldon's analysis supports this conclusion about the Ambrosian tradition as well: 'in some cases it more accurately reflects what was probably the original reading of the archetype, or a copyist who knew the material better.'<sup>19</sup>

von Bourscheid published a 5-volume German translation (Vienna, 1777–81) titled *Kaiser Leo des Philosophen Strategie und Taktik*.

<sup>15</sup> J. H. Pryor and E. M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon: The Byzantine Navy, ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> A. Dain and J. A. de Foucault, 'Les stratégistes byzantins', *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 385. This manuscript was commissioned by Basil Lekapenos, an apparently enthusiastic amateur of *taktika*, and contains a collection of military works. C. M. Mazzucchi, 'Dagli anni di Basilio Parakoimomenos (Cod. Ambr. B 119 Sup.)', *Aevum* 52 (1978), 267–316.

<sup>17</sup> Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 382–4. This manuscript is a very large, high-quality volume of 405 folios, bearing mostly military documents; it begins and ends with texts attributed to Constantine VII. Thus they conclude that it was an imperial copy commissioned by him.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, xi. A more thorough survey of the manuscript tradition can be found in Haldon, *Commentary*, 55–65.

<sup>19</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 65.

For this reason, much of the analysis of this chapter is based on the Ambrosian manuscript as published in the *Patrologia Graeca*. For the sake of convenience however, English quotations from the Dennis translation will be used wherever possible, with the most notable exception being the analysis of Constitution 2, which is twice as long in the Ambrosian as in the Laurentian tradition and thus contains a significant chunk of material on the general not presented in the Dennis edition.<sup>20</sup> In places, the paragraph number of Constitution 18 also varies, so both editions are cited where relevant. In [Chapter 4](#), the analysis of the concept of the Christian general is generated primarily from Constitution 2, including lengthy sections not found in the Laurentian recension; thus Dennis's edition and the accompanying commentary here proves of limited use.

### Structure and Content

Composed in an era characterized by adaptation and paraphrase or more bluntly, 'la grande vogue de la copie, au X<sup>e</sup> siècle',<sup>21</sup> the manual consists of a formal, highly decorative preamble followed by 20 constitutions and an epilogue.<sup>22</sup> In the preamble, Leo writes that he has carefully researched the writings of authors both ancient and modern to discover the duties of a general and the science of strategy.<sup>23</sup> This comment echoes the introduction of Maurice's seventh-century manual, the *Strategikon*; Leo's book, however, appears to use primarily three identifiable sources: the *Strategikos* of Onesandros; the *Tactica theoria* of Aelian for definitions; and the *Strategikon* of Maurice for the arrangement of the material. These three indicate the essential library of the early tenth-century strategist, or as Dain calls it, 'le bagage courant de la tradition des stratégestes'.<sup>24</sup> Haldon has identified other texts consulted or copied by Leo.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For more on the ideal general, see [Chapter 4](#).

<sup>21</sup> Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégestes', 353.

<sup>22</sup> The constitutions are titled as follows: 1. On tactics and the general. 2. On the qualities of a general. 3. On how one ought to make plans. 4. On the disposition of the army and the selection of leaders. 5. On weaponry. 6. Armour and weapons for infantry and cavalry. 7. Exercises for cavalry and infantry. 8. On crimes of soldiers. 9. On marching. 10. On the baggage train. 11. On camps. 12. Preparing for battle. 13. The day before battle. 14. On the day of battle. 15. Sieges. 16. After the battle. 17. Surprise attacks. 18. On battle orders of Romans and other nations. 19. On naval warfare. 20. Various military maxims. Epilogue.

<sup>23</sup> *Taktika*, Prologue 6 (Dennis, 6–7).

<sup>24</sup> Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégestes', 356.

<sup>25</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 39–55. Haldon posits these three, plus a derivative compilation of Polyaeus (for Constitution 20 primarily) and possibly three texts of Syrianos *magistros*. Cf. p. 52.

The *Taktika* itself reveals an emperor with wide-ranging interests, reflecting his literary education as well as a strong sense of responsibility with regard to leadership in all spheres of the empire. Although Leo himself never went on campaign, he lists the sources of his military understanding: past imperial dispatches, the records left by his father, Basil I, and reports from his own field generals.<sup>26</sup> Grosdidier de Matons has remarked that the work reflects not the curiosity of a dilettante, but the mature ideas of a teacher and organizer with ‘le goût d’enseigner et de codifier’.<sup>27</sup> Although Leo uses known sources, he does not slavishly copy them. He paraphrases, expands, or thoughtfully edits them to suit contemporary circumstances. The two most original parts of the book are Constitution 18 (on the characteristics and tactics of various peoples) and Constitution 19 (on naval warfare), although the summary provided by the Epilogue may be considered vintage Leo.

The emperor says his motivation for writing the book was his discovery that although administrative mistakes do not result in great harm, ‘the death of military discipline has rendered the Roman state most miserable, as we see daily.’<sup>28</sup> These daily miseries are surely the military setbacks described previously. Therefore, he sought to revive military science, to provide a concise manual of simple instructions, so that Byzantine armies would gain victories even over more numerous foes. More specifically, he names the greatest threat to the empire at the time of composition: the Saracens.<sup>29</sup> He likens his book to a pilot that will guide the ship of war, so to speak.<sup>30</sup> He expects it to bear the force of law, and therefore to be followed assiduously.<sup>31</sup> The *Taktika* does not represent Leo’s first attempt at military writing. Sometime earlier, perhaps while still a student, he compiled the *Problemata*, a list of questions and answers that repeat material from

<sup>26</sup> *Taktika* 9.14, II.21, 15.32, 17.65, 18.95.

<sup>27</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Trois études’, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Prooimion, *Taktika, Patrologia Graeca* 107.673B. Τῆς δὲ στρατηγικῆς μεθόδου διαπεσοῦσης, τοσοῦτον τὰ Ῥωμαίων συνελάθῃ πράγματα, ὅσον ἡ πείρα τοῦ νῦν χρόνου πάσιν ἅπαντα κατὰ ὄφθαλμοὺς ὁρώμενα παρίστησι πρόδηλα. (Dennis, *Taktika*, 4–5).

<sup>29</sup> Epilogue 71, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 1093B. Ὅσα δὲ κεφάλαια ἕτερα τὰ, ὡς εἰκός, ἀπάντων τὰ ἐν ἐκάστῳ πολέμου καιρῷ ἢ τινοσ ἐκείνου παρασκευῆς καὶ μάλιστα ἐν τῷ νῦν ἡμῖν ἐνοχλοῦντι Σαρακηνῶν ἔθνει, δι’ ὅπερ, ὡς εἶρηται που ἡμῖν, καὶ τὸ παρὸν συντέτακται βιβλίον. (Dennis, *Taktika*, 642).

<sup>30</sup> Prooimion, *Taktika, Patrologia Graeca* 107.677B. Dennis, *Taktika*, Prologue 9, lines 89.90–1, p. 9. Ὡσπερ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ὀλκάδι πελάγη διαπορθμεύεσθαι κυβερνητικῆς ἐπιστήμης χωρὶς, οὕτως οὐδὲ πολεμίου καταγωνίζεσθαι τάξεως καὶ στρατηγίας ἐκτός, δι’ ἧς οὐ μόνον τοῦ ἰσορροποῦντος τῶν πολεμίων περιγίνεσαι σὺν Θεῷ δυνατόν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πολλῶ πλέον τῷ ἀριθμῷ ὑπερβάλλοντος.

<sup>31</sup> Prooimion, *Taktika, Patrologia Graeca* 107.677B. Dennis, *Taktika*, Prologue 9, lines 94–6, p. 8. Ὡσπερ οὖν ἄλλον τινα πρόχειρον νόμον ὑμῖν, ὡς εἶρηται, στρατηγικόν τὴν παροῦσαν πραγματείαν ὑπαγορεύοντες προσεχῶς τε καὶ ἐπιπόνως ἀκούειν ὑμῶν παρακελευόμεθα.

Maurice's *Strategikon* nearly verbatim.<sup>32</sup> His name is attached to a tenth-century compilation of military wisdom in a manual known as the *Sylloge Tacticorum*, which combined two earlier tactical books.<sup>33</sup> Although not original works, strictly speaking, these do show the emperor's early interest in military affairs and, perhaps, his awareness that rulers ought to have military expertise.

In the *Taktika*, Leo employs the second person singular throughout; unlike Maurice, he directly addresses the ideal general of the Byzantine armies. He follows the arrangement of the *Strategikon* of Maurice, but unlike Maurice, Leo's text has no diagrams. Although he follows the subject matter and organization of Maurice, he does not simply cut and paste, but adds his own commentary, making his text significantly longer than the text of the *Strategikon*. Leo's book is also far more overtly Christianized. Maurice uses no biblical quotations at all, while Leo uses biblical language, allusions, and some direct quotes from the Bible to bolster his arguments.<sup>34</sup>

He mentions that he has been unable to find anything in the ancient writings on naval warfare, giving rise to speculation about his source for Constitution 19 on conducting sea battles.<sup>35</sup> However, from the very beginning, he divides military endeavour into land-based and sea-based concerns, repeating that he will address both.<sup>36</sup> He also makes references to seaborne warfare throughout, which indicates that information on naval tactics was conceived as an integral part of the book from its inception, despite the addition of Constitution 19 as a kind of appendix in the oldest manuscripts.

The date of the work cannot be precisely established, but there is little doubt that it was composed during the reign of Leo VI. It is generally thought to date to the first decade of the tenth century, as it mentions the Bulgarian expedition of 894 as well as two other firm chronological dates.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> A. Dain (ed.), *Leonis VI Sapientis Problemata* (Paris, 1935).

<sup>33</sup> A. Dain (ed.), *Sylloge tacticorum, quae olim "Inedita Leonis tactica" dicebatur* (Paris, 1938). Dennis believes that Leo's text refers to the *Sylloge Tacticorum* in Constitution 2.33 (Dennis, n. 16, p. 37). Haldon argues that Leo's authorship is unlikely, but provides more detailed information about this text. *Commentary*, 15–17 and 66–8.

<sup>34</sup> For a list of direct quotations from Maurice, see Haldon, *Commentary*, 542–5. For analysis of the biblical allusions and language, see [Chapters 3–4](#).

<sup>35</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys propose parts of Maurice's *Strategikon* and possibly parts of Syrianos *magistros*, *Age of the Dromon*, 175–85. Haldon thinks some material may have been drawn from Syrianos *magistros* or Polyaeus. For a more thorough discussion of Leo's sources, see Haldon, *Commentary*, 39–55 and 390–2.

<sup>36</sup> *Taktika*, 1.1, 7 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 680B,C). Dennis, *Taktika* 1.10, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Taktika*, 18.42 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 955D); (Dennis, *Taktika*, 11.22, 204–5). Κατὰ δὲ τὴν Βουλγάρων ἐκστρατείας . . .

Constitution 19, on naval warfare, has been dated to 907.<sup>38</sup> Haldon's very helpful discussion of the dating of the text is lengthy and detailed. Ultimately, he considers the full text to have been fully drafted, at least initially, by 904.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of the *Taktika* has been recognized for many years, and its influence on later Byzantine strategic thinking is undisputed. Alphonse Dain, one of the great scholars of the genre, accords Leo the distinction of single-handedly inspiring a renaissance in the literature of military strategy.<sup>40</sup> Many of Leo's ideas find development in the works of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, and the impact of his military thinking is articulated in many later tenth-century military manuals. Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–9), for example, cites Leo's *Taktika* directly,<sup>41</sup> while Nikephoros Ouranos (950–1011), one of Basil II's most illustrious generals, reprises the book in the first 55 chapters of his own *Taktika* (c.1000).<sup>42</sup> Both of these writers maintained with very little change the prescriptions for heavy cavalry laid down in Leo's *Taktika*. Even more profound proof of the impact of this text is provided by the evidence of an early tenth-century translation of it into Arabic, thus indicating Muslim awareness of new Byzantine approaches to warfare.<sup>43</sup>

Despite being mostly paraphrase with clear and explicit reference to material from earlier writers, the *Taktika* holds flashes of originality as well. For example, Constitution 18 contains the first analytical list of the enemies of Byzantium since Maurice's sixth-century list, including its most fearsome – the Arabs – a foe hitherto missing from thoughtful consideration in terms of military strategy in any extant published writing.<sup>44</sup> In fact, sections 109–31 of this constitution appear to have engendered

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 355. They rely on C. Downey for this dating, who argued on the basis of evidence of multiple redactions. More detail than this is not provided by Dain. Pryor and Jeffreys accept Dain's dating for the *Taktika*, and also the mid tenth-century date for the compilation of Constitution XIX in the Ambrosianus manuscript. (Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*, 175).

<sup>39</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 59–66.

<sup>40</sup> Dain and Foucault, 'Les stratégistes', 354.

<sup>41</sup> *De velitatione bellica*, xx.8–10, xx1.8–13; in G. T. Dennis (tr.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, DC, 1985), 137–239.

<sup>42</sup> A. Dain, *La 'Tactique' de Nicéphore Ouranos* (Paris, 1937). See pp. 19–20 for the chapter contents and original sources, and 123–8 for a list of partial translations and editions.

<sup>43</sup> For Arabic translations and abbreviations of Leo VI's *Taktika*, see N. Serikoff, 'Leo VI Arabus? An Unknown Fragment from the Arabic Translation of Leo VI's *Taktika*', *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 4 (2003), 112–18; Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*, 645–66. See also T. G. Kolias 'The Taktika of Leo VI and the Arabs', *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984): 129–35.

<sup>44</sup> For Maurice's list, see his *Strategikon* XII (G. T. Dennis (tr.), *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1984), 113–26).

its own autonomous manuscript tradition, further testimony to the originality of the material.<sup>45</sup> The other most obvious example of original content remains Constitution 19, on naval warfare. Unique among Byzantine texts of the era, it reveals an author keenly aware of growing Arab sea power that threatened to turn the Mediterranean into a 'Saracen lake'. Leo acknowledges the absence of any written material on the subject when he states that he could not find any treatises on naval warfare to consult, although Haldon makes clear that Leo undoubtedly used material from Polyaeus's *Strategika* (dated to the second century CE) and from Syrianos *magistros* (date uncertain, possibly ninth or tenth century CE).<sup>46</sup> Leo himself claims as his sources for the section on naval warfare to be the contemporary admirals and officers of the fleet.<sup>47</sup>

Because of these original contributions, the *Taktika* has in the past received attention mostly with reference to Constitutions 18 and 19. Among the most notable scholars to have considered them are: Dagron, who has written what has long been viewed the classic interpretation of Constitution 18, and Pryor and Jeffreys, whose monumental work on the Byzantine navy includes a critical edition of Constitution 19, as well as translations of five other works on naval warfare, three in Greek and two in Arabic.<sup>48</sup> The second Arabic text, dated to the fourteenth century, specifically quotes 'the book of Leo the Greek king', a 'useful book . . . written for the use of the Byzantines in their warfare against Muslims' which 'contains great military benefits'.<sup>49</sup>

According to Dagron, until recently one of the few interpreters of the *Taktika* who sees its cultural implications as well as its military prescriptions, Leo's contribution to the genre consists of his attention to the social context of the military and the overriding concern for the Byzantine failure to counteract Arab forays. In Dagron's eyes, Leo reasons that the Arabs owe their strength to the fact that they justify war on religious grounds, thereby integrating religious fervour with societal behaviour to the advantage of

<sup>45</sup> G. Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle: À propos des constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI', *Comptes rendus de l'academie des inscriptions de belles lettres* (1983), 220, n.9. Haldon believes it was the other way round: that the naval material was an independent treatise later added to the *Taktika* (*Commentary*, 389–92).

<sup>46</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 390.

<sup>47</sup> *Taktika*, 19.1 (Dennis, 502).

<sup>48</sup> Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique'. Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*.

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad ibn Mankalī, *Al-abkām al-mulūkiyya wa 'l-dawābīt al-nāmūsiyya*, tr. A. Shboul, in Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*, 656–7.

the military.<sup>50</sup> This effectively eliminates the problems of recruitment (martyrs go straight to paradise and bypass judgement) and of poverty of the soldiers, because giving to the military becomes, in effect, a type of religious activity.<sup>51</sup> Leo delicately recommends a Christianized version of this, exhorting a similar support for the Byzantine army. Thus the manual is intended at least partly as a guide for practical theology by implementing military policies supported by the Orthodox Christian faith. Pryor and Jeffreys, however, argue principally against this view, contending that Constitution 19 (and by implication, all of Leo's military writings and indeed many other ninth- and tenth-century military treatises) is a work of antiquarianism, not of practical use.<sup>52</sup>

This book rejects the antiquarian theory and argues that the *Taktika* was not only intended to be practical, but that it provides significant insight into more than the social aspect of the army or navy alone. It is Constitution 18 in the context of the whole book that furnishes the richest material for this practical aspect. This chapter pursues Dagron's insights even further, arguing that Leo recommended more than just a change in recruitment policy. He wanted most of all to reverse the momentum of Muslim military victories by reviving military science among the Byzantines, with a particular focus on raising morale. To accomplish this, Leo uses every means possible, articulating a new perspective on the enemy, on the role of the divine in battle, and most especially the soldiers' perspective on their Christian cultural identity vis-à-vis Islam. This was to have far-reaching implications for both domestic concerns and international diplomacy in the decades that followed. On a larger scale, the contribution of Leo consists of the definite articulation of his religious convictions applied to the Byzantine *oikoumene*. This was first developed in an unpublished 2010 dissertation and later expanded by Haldon in his comprehensive 2014 commentary on the *Taktika*.<sup>53</sup> But before analysing the significance of the text of Constitution 18 in [Chapter 3](#), it is important to outline its contents.

<sup>50</sup> Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique', 221.

<sup>51</sup> This is known as *wakf*, or '*al-habs fi sabil Allah*, the donation of horses, weapons, slaves for the sake of  *jihad* or houses for sheltering warriors at the frontier.' (G. E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (London, 1997), 9: 59.) For more on this, see G. Dagron and H. Mihaescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris, 1986), 148–9.

<sup>52</sup> They write that it 'reads like that of an arm-chair sailor dreaming up stratagems for naval warfare in front of a fire in the imperial palace' (Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the Dromon*, 180–1). This characterization of Leo VI is repeated throughout.

<sup>53</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 22–38.

### Constitution 18 and the ‘Saracens’

In Constitution 18, ‘On the methods of arranging the armies of various nations and the Romans’ (Περὶ μελέτης διαφόρων ἔθνικῶν τε καὶ ῥωμαϊκῶν παρατάξεων), Leo takes the opportunity to begin laying out the religious dichotomy that is key to understanding his project of rearticulating Byzantine identity. This constitution intentionally mimics the eleventh chapter of Maurice’s *Strategikon*, where different enemies of the Byzantine empire are described and advice given on which strategies to use against them. In the *Taktika*, Constitution 18 consists of 154 sections in the Ambrosian version (150 in Laurentian), making it the second longest constitution of the entire tract.<sup>54</sup> Only Constitution 20, a collection of military maxims, is longer with 221 sections.

The structure of this longest constitution largely follows Maurice for the first two-thirds or so.<sup>55</sup> Sections 109–54 (103–50 in the Laurentian recension) deal with the Saracens.<sup>56</sup> The larger part of the material on the Saracens (sections 109–42) discusses their origins, weapons, tactics, and strategies, while the shorter part (sections 143–54) is dedicated to Byzantine tactics and strategies in response to this new enemy.<sup>57</sup>

Leo’s approach to each adversary generally follows the pattern set forth by Maurice: comments on character, followed by conduct in battle, weaponry, and strategic counter-tactics. Scattered throughout, one finds ongoing ‘insights’ into the characteristic behaviour of each nation. For example, the Franks are impetuous and undisciplined, while the Slavs are independent to a fault, but hospitable to strangers.<sup>58</sup> Religion is not usually mentioned.<sup>59</sup>

However, while still more or less following Maurice’s pattern, Leo chose to address directly the awkwardness of fighting against a foe who was also a Christian brother, a state of affairs that did not exist in the sixth century.

<sup>54</sup> The longer Ambrosian recension is found in the *Patrologia Graeca* 107. The Laurentian manuscript has 150 sections. Cf. Dennis, *Taktika*, 436–501.

<sup>55</sup> See Haldon’s description of the structure in *Commentary*, 331–3.

<sup>56</sup> *Strategikon*, XI.1, 113f., with considerable expansion and new material.

<sup>57</sup> Sections 109–31 have an autonomous manuscript tradition, revealing the originality of the material. Even in the *Laurentianus* LV-4, which contains the entire *Taktika*, it is copied independently under the title Πῶς δεῖ Σαρακηνοῖς μάχεσθαι, thus appearing twice. Cf. Dain and Foucault, ‘Les stratégistes’, 362. Also, A. Dain, ‘Inventaire raisonné des cents manuscrits des ‘constitutions tactiques’ de Léon VI le sage’, *Scriptorium* 1 (1946), 45–6.

<sup>58</sup> On the Franks’ lack of discipline, *Taktika*, 18.78. On the Slavs’ love of independence, 18.99; on their hospitality, 18.102.

<sup>59</sup> For a fuller analysis of these other aspects of this important Constitution, see Haldon, *Commentary*, 334–88.



So Leo adjusted his commentary, particularly on the Bulgarians, remarking that 'since the Bulgarians, however, embraced the peace in Christ and share the same faith in him as the Romans, . . . we do not think of taking up arms against them . . . inasmuch as we are brothers because of our one faith . . . we are not eager to describe either their battle formation against ours or ours against theirs.'<sup>60</sup>

After describing Roman formations and updating the contents of Maurice's *Strategikon* on Turks, Franks, and Slavs, Leo announces that he is turning his attention to Saracens, to consider their character, armament, conduct in combat, and how the Roman army ought to counter them.<sup>61</sup> With respect to the Saracens, who stand in for the Persians as the enemy to the south and east, something new is introduced. The subject matter handled here is unique in Byzantine military literature: Leo VI is the first to address the problem of countering a Muslim enemy, and he is very conscious of the religious difference. Whereas he is uncomfortable with fighting Bulgarians because they are brothers in the faith, he is pitiless in his approach to Arabs who follow a rival faith that had prompted the destruction of much of the Byzantine empire, calling them a 'barbarous and faithless race'.<sup>62</sup> He then launches into an extended discussion that continues to the end of the chapter, taking up fully a third of Constitution 18. The most prominent difference to Maurice's approach is Leo's treatment of religious orientation and how it affects warfare. Indeed, this section contains the most references to God and to the need to fight for the Christian faith.<sup>63</sup>

Two interwoven concepts dominate this section of Leo's *Taktika*: religious fervour and social structure, especially as each impinges on the motivation, preparation, and execution of military engagements. The classical Byzantine attitude towards warfare held it to be a necessary evil, permitted but not encouraged by the Church. Leo allows for, and indeed, would prefer to increase the influence of religion among Byzantium's soldiers, to make them more effective. Renowned for the subtlety of their diplomacy, Byzantines were caricatured as cowardly or effete by more bellicose Western powers,<sup>64</sup> yet the survival and even flourishing of the Byzantine empire, often engaged on multiple fronts and usually outnumbered, bespeaks a

<sup>60</sup> *Taktika*, 18.42. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 955B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 452–5).

<sup>61</sup> *Taktika*, 18.109. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 971B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.103, 474).

<sup>62</sup> ἕθνος βάρβαρόν τε καὶ ἀπιστόν. *Taktika*, 18.128. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 976D (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.122, 482).

<sup>63</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 334.

<sup>64</sup> Leo, following Maurice, notes that the Franks (or 'light-haired peoples', i.e. northern Europeans) were impatient in battle, disobedient to their officers, easily deceived, and avaricious. Cf. *Strategikon* xi, *Taktika* 18.78–98. For more on Byzantine relations with the West, see J. Shepard, 'Aspects of

different reality. Leo's efforts to instruct his generals on successful strategy and effective field tactics, undergirded by his own personal religious convictions and prodigious study, found in theological diversity a powerful tool of persuasion. It is the consideration of Christianity vis-à-vis the forces of Islam that sets apart this book from its predecessors.

Leo structures his discussion on the Saracens around several poles, each of which merits discussion. First, he describes the Arabs as a race, recounting their history and origin and offering simplistic comments – borrowed from Maurice in his discussion on the Persians – about their physical constitution. Second, he characterizes their faith as blasphemy, noting where it diverges from Christian orthodoxy and extrapolating the differences to exploit them strategically. Third, he depicts Muslim recruitment patterns as a function of applied theology, and surprisingly, suggests that the Byzantines might look to this as a sort of example for solving similar difficulties. Fourth, he recommends certain tactics for responding to Arab battle strategies, in particular advocating a coordinated attack by land and sea. Fifth, he mentions some details about their weaponry and armour, stating that the Arabs kit themselves out 'in the Roman way'.<sup>65</sup> Although this appears to present a great deal of information, what Leo provides is not comprehensive. Rather, he gives only a brief outline of the new enemy faced by Byzantium. His description is deliberately schematic and selective because it is not his goal to educate his reader about the Saracens, but rather to focus on how to counter them.

### Origin of the Arab Enemy

As one shall see in [Chapter 3](#), Leo's religious argument is grounded in part on his sense of the Arabs as alien to the Christian *oikoumene*. He describes the Saracens as an Arab race, who lived in the past on the approaches to what Romans called 'Arabia Felix', in the desert reaches near the southern end of the Arabian peninsula. After receiving the laws of Muhammad, they later settled throughout Palestine and Syria.<sup>66</sup> Leo's brief historical sketch asserts that the Saracens, under the influence of Muhammad their prophet, occupied these lands by military force, adding Mesopotamia and Egypt to their possessions. These locations would have resonated with the Byzantine

Byzantine Attitudes and Policy Towards the West in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in J. D. Howard-Johnston (ed.), *Byzantium and the West* (Amsterdam, 1988). He comments that Leo regarded most Westerners as little better than barbarians (94).

<sup>65</sup> κατὰ τὸν Ῥωμαϊκὸν τρόπον. *Taktika*, 18.115 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 973B). Dennis, *Taktika* 18.110, p. 478.

<sup>66</sup> *Taktika*, 18.110. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 972 B–C (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.104, 474).

audience, as they had been Roman and therefore Byzantine lands for centuries before their loss to the Arabs in the early seventh century. Aware of the need to explain this sudden reversal, Leo clarifies, ‘for the war of the Romans with the Persians gave them the opportunity to seize the land’.<sup>67</sup> Here he makes indirect reference to Byzantine economic exhaustion and thinly stretched defences that enabled the newly Muslim Arabs to achieve staggering victories, thus amputating two-thirds of formerly Byzantine territory in the space of only 12 years.

In essence, this last comment seems an attempt to vitiate the lightning-fast Arab conquests as succeeding only because the Byzantine empire at the time was enfeebled by long years of warfare with the Persians. It might be possible to read in this reference an implication of similar circumstances in Leo’s time, and of course it was true that Muslim raids continued apace on the eastern frontier during the late ninth and early tenth century, while from the sea, the danger of attack was also increasing, especially in the Aegean. Later, he explicitly parallels the Persians and the Saracens, stating that the latter afflict the Byzantines today no less than did the former in previous times.<sup>68</sup> The text leaves the reader to draw his<sup>69</sup> own conclusions about contemporary ninth-century economic problems and underperforming defences.

Subsequently, Leo makes certain comments about the influence of environmental factors on the physical constitution of the Saracens as it determines their battle tactics. In particular, he claims that they dislike night-time operations and ought therefore to be attacked at night, especially when they are far from home.<sup>70</sup> In addition, they are ‘susceptible to cold, snow and the downpour of rain’<sup>71</sup> and ‘prefer the fair weather and the warmer seasons’.<sup>72</sup> Based on these observations, Leo then counsels his generals to attack in winter and during cold and rainy weather since the Saracens have often been destroyed when overtaken by Roman forces in similar conditions.<sup>73</sup> Leo’s views echo Maurice’s comments on the Persians as people who prefer heat and dislike cold and rain; this is a common literary topos. The Arabs inverted the concept for their stereotypes of

<sup>67</sup> ἄπερ αὐτοῖς ὁ καιρὸς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἀπὸ Περσῶν χώραν ἔδωκε κατασχεῖν. (18.110).

<sup>68</sup> *Taktika*, 18.142. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 981B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.135, 488).

<sup>69</sup> The generic ‘he’ is used here on the grounds that Byzantine generals, the target audience for this book, were always male.

<sup>70</sup> *Taktika*, 18.117. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 973C. Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.112, 478).

<sup>71</sup> *Taktika*, 18.124. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 975B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.118, 480). Λυπεῖ δὲ τοῦτο τὸ ἔθνος ψύξις, καὶ χειμῶν, καὶ ὑετῶν ἐπιφοραί.

<sup>72</sup> *Taktika*, 18.125. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 975B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.119, 480). Χαίροντες οὖν ταῖς εὐδαιῖς καὶ ταῖς θερμοτέραις ὥραις τότε συλλέγονται.

<sup>73</sup> *Taktika*, 18.126. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 976C (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.120, 482).

Westerners as people who dislike heat and are used to cold and rain.<sup>74</sup> Their *topoi* for Byzantines described them as deceitful, miserly, pitiless, and sexually aberrant (because of the Christian emphasis on celibacy).<sup>75</sup>

Both Leo and Maurice give the same reason for the enemies' negative reaction to rain – the damp slackens their bowstrings. Presumably, however, the meteorological conditions would hold also for the Byzantines, hence it is no advantage to attack in the rain unless one is using different weaponry or has some way of protecting the bowstrings from the rain. It is interesting to note that since the Arabs displayed far greater skill with the bow, this advice appears to constitute an admission of their superiority with that weapon.<sup>76</sup>

Yet Leo goes on to say: Saracens also present an aspect different to other enemies, not only in race, but also in their tactics. Leo mentions the use of exotic camels, which frighten the Roman horses; the din of cymbals and drums, which deafen the Roman soldiers;<sup>77</sup> and the dismaying sight of lightly armed, swift-moving African infantrymen,<sup>78</sup> carrying only bows and wearing no body armour.<sup>79</sup> The way to prepare the Roman army to handle such unfamiliar situations, says Leo elsewhere in the *Taktika*, is to make them familiar. Train the horses to be accustomed to the sound of cymbals and drums; put blinkers on their eyes so they do not see the camels.<sup>80</sup> Since there is no mention of camels in accounts of battles between Byzantines and Muslims, this information probably represents a reproduction of Maurice's comments on Persians, included here by Leo prophylactically, in case camels are ever used.

### Leo's Description of the Muslim Faith

More central to the religious message of the *Taktika*, Leo characterizes the Muslim faith as blasphemy, essentially because it does not agree with

<sup>74</sup> C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), esp. ch. 5 on 'How the Muslims Saw the Franks: Ethnic and Religious Stereotypes', 257–328.

<sup>75</sup> N. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (London, 2004), 120–3.

<sup>76</sup> A survey of extant Arabic military treatises reveals a preponderance of manuals devoted to the subject of archery, which may indicate how important skills with a bow and arrow were considered in the medieval Arab world. A. R. Zaki, 'Military Literature of the Arabs', *Cahiers d'histoire égyptienne*, 7.3 (1955), 149–60.

<sup>77</sup> *Taktika*, 17.112–13, 141. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 971D–973A, 982A (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.106, 476).

<sup>78</sup> For more about the use of Ethiopians, see J. L. Bacharach, 'African Military Slaves in the Medieval Middle East: The Cases of Iraq (869–955) and Egypt (868–1171)', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (1981), 471–95.

<sup>79</sup> *Taktika*, 18.114, 135. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 973A, 979A (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.109, 476).

<sup>80</sup> *Taktika*, 18.23. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 952B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.134, 488); cf. 12.66–9, 106. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 825A–C, 834D.

Orthodox Christian doctrine, in particular with regard to Christology, or in Leo's words, 'They claim piety while practising blasphemy.'<sup>81</sup> Leo notes that Muslim orthodoxy forbids adherents to refer to Jesus Christ as Saviour, nor does it accord him the status of deity. That is, they deny that Christ is God.<sup>82</sup> Worse, 'they say that God delights in wars – God, who scatters abroad the nations who desire war.'<sup>83</sup> That is, they make God the author of evil.<sup>84</sup> Further, 'they say that everything comes from God, even if it be bad; so if they happen to suffer some reverse, they do not resist it, as being something determined by God; and the strength of their attack fails.'<sup>85</sup>

These comments do not amount to a complete, or even perhaps an accurate description of the Islamic faith. But that is not Leo's purpose here. He is concerned to highlight only those points that will help to draw a stark comparison between Orthodox Christianity and the faith of the Muslim warriors. Thus he presents the bare essentials necessary for casting into relief the inferior (as he sees it) qualities of the soldiers who have been causing so much harm to Byzantium. Because the goal of the book is to increase the effectiveness of the Byzantine army, partly by raising its morale, he gives here a truncated description of the beliefs of Muslim troops, intended to demolish their purported religious advantage. These comments reflect Leo's deep and abiding passion for theological solutions. The Byzantines knew that their enemies expected to achieve martyr status if they were killed in battle, but no such honour awaited Christian fighters. The martyrdom of Christian prisoners may have contributed to the problem of battlefield morale, since capture and eventual exchange or martyrdom was preferable to death in battle. Rather than dwell on this inequity, Leo describes the Muslim faith in a way that draws attention to its deficits, from a Christian point of view.

### Muslim Recruitment Patterns

This practical focus is evidenced in his discussion of Muslim recruitment patterns as a function of applied Islamic theology. Given his unbending

<sup>81</sup> *Taktika*, 18.III. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 972C (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.105, 476). δοκοῦσιν εὐσεβεῖν, βλασφημίαν δὲ τὴν αὐτῶν δοκοῦσαν εὐσεβείαν.

<sup>82</sup> *Taktika*, 18.III. Χριστὸν μὲν τὸν ἀληθινὸν Θεὸν καὶ τοῦ κόσμου σωτῆρα καλεῖν Θεὸν οὐκ ἀνέχονται.

<sup>83</sup> *Taktika*, 18.III. καὶ πολέμοις χαίρειν λέγουσι τὸν Θεὸν τὸν διασκορπίζοντα ἔθνη τὰ τοὺς πολέμους θέλοντα.

<sup>84</sup> *Taktika*, 18.III. παντὸς δὲ καὶ κακοῦ ἔργου τὸν Θεὸν εἶναι αἴτιον ὑποτίθενται.

<sup>85</sup> *Taktika*, 18.II7. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 973C (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.112, 478). ὡς ἀπὸ Θεοῦ γὰρ τὸ πᾶν, εἰ καὶ κακὸν εἶη, λέγοντες εἶναι, εἰ συμβῆ αὐτοὺς ἐναντίον τι παθεῖν, ὡς ἀπὸ Θεοῦ ὀριζομένου οὐκ ἀντιπίπτουσιν, ἀλλὰ τῇ προσβολῇ σφαλέντες χαλῶσι τὸν τόνον.

opinion of Islam as a barbarous faith, it is nothing less than stunning that, in this regard at least, he holds it up as a model for the Roman army to imitate. He characterizes the recruitment of Muslim warriors as a free choice, remarking that ‘they come together by free decision and all together (in large numbers), the rich ready to die for a reward, the poor desiring to win a portion of the booty.’<sup>86</sup> Contrary to Byzantine practice, formal military rolls of conscription are not necessary, because Arab soldiers whether rich or poor anticipate high wages.<sup>87</sup>

The rich volunteer for the opportunity to win reward (μισθός), probably referring to the Muslim doctrine that those who die fighting non-Muslims are assured entry into paradise. Since the word can also mean ‘wages’ or ‘recompense’, the statement might be interpreted in two ways – either they fight for cash (which the rich would not need) or they fight for a non-cash heavenly reward. Dagron has argued for the second interpretation because the same word (μισθός) occurs again in the same section with reference to spiritual reward for non-combatants; the same distinction is made in 18.132 between those who do not fear death and those who hope to win plunder; the parallel concept for the Byzantine soldiers is ‘salvation of our souls’ (ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχικῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας);<sup>88</sup> and finally because Leo confines his discussion in the *Taktika* to thematic armies, which may have been closer to militia than regular fighting forces, in distinction to professional tagmatic armies. By parity of reasoning therefore, he views the Arab armies not as professionals but volunteer forces.<sup>89</sup> The poor fight for the simple motivation of winning booty (πραΐδας).

The real innovation of Muslim recruitment, however, includes the voluntary provision and supply of soldiers by the civilian populace. For they, ‘women as well as men, consider that in this way they are co-participants. For it is to their profit (μισθός) to arm the soldiers if they themselves are

<sup>86</sup> *Taktika*, 18.128. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 977A (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.122, 482). Συνάγονται δὲ οὐχὶ ἀπὸ καταγραφῆς στρατευόμενοι, ἀλλ’ ἕκαστος γνώμη ἑκουσίᾳ συντρέχοντες πανοικίᾳ, πλοῦσιοι μὲν, ὥστε ὑπὲρ ἰδίου ἔθνους μισθῷ ἀποθανεῖν, πένητες δὲ, ἵνα τι τῆς πραΐδας κερδήσωσιν.

<sup>87</sup> For a summary of Byzantine recruitment practices in the ninth and tenth centuries, see J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (London, 1999), 120–8. See also J. Haldon (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Three treatises on imperial military expeditions* (Vienna, 1990), Text C, and commentary, 236–7. See also Haldon’s earlier study: *Recruitment and Conscription in the Byzantine Army, c. 550–950: A Study on the Origins of the stratiotika ktemata* (Vienna, 1979).

<sup>88</sup> *Taktika*, 18.133. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 977C (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.127, 484). Riedel, *Fighting*, 108. Haldon, *Commentary*, 367.

<sup>89</sup> Dagron, ‘Byzance et le modèle islamique’, 221.

physically unable (δι' ἀσθένειαν σώματος) to take up arms.<sup>90</sup> The profit mentioned here refers to spiritual reward, since civilians are certainly not paid to equip the army. Rather, the entire society contributes to the Arab war effort because the Muslim religion provides both motivation and legitimacy. Moreover, this policy not only makes recruitment easy, it encourages even those without a natural predisposition to fight to volunteer.<sup>91</sup>

Section 129 begins with a baldly normative statement: ‘The Romans should not only strive after these things, but both soldiers and those who have not hitherto served should campaign together voluntarily and in high spirits against those who blaspheme against the Ruler of All, Christ our God, who strengthens those who campaign for him against the nations by means of the whole society, with arms, gifts and intercessory prayers.’<sup>92</sup> Leo clearly advocates the Muslim policy as a model for Byzantine armies. He also recommends developing the policy even further, adding the care of military families to the list of civilian support activities.<sup>93</sup> Under this programme, the Byzantine armies, says Leo, cannot fail. A little further on, he supplies more information regarding the weaponry most needed: weapons – ‘particularly with bows and many arrows’.<sup>94</sup>

### Byzantine Battle Responses

Leo’s advice on counter-tactics combines practical considerations as well as larger strategic guidance, both indications that this book was intended for practical use, not merely the preservation of past ideals.<sup>95</sup> The Romans, he says, should attack out of season and from ambush positions, not in pitched battles on open ground.<sup>96</sup> Timing ambushes to coincide with Arab retreats when they are tired and hampered by the weight of plunder is especially useful; the obvious geographical location for this would be the

<sup>90</sup> *Taktika*, 18.128. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 977A (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.122, 482). καὶ γυναῖκες μάλιστα καὶ ἄνδρες, ὥσπερ διὰ τούτου κοινωνοῦντες αὐτοῖς τῆς ἐκστρατείας, καὶ μισθὸν ἠγούμενοι τὸ καθοπλίσαι στρατιώτας, οἱ ὀπλισθῆναι δι’ ἀσθένειαν σώματος μὴ δυνάμενοι.

<sup>91</sup> *Taktika*, 18.132 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.126, 484).

<sup>92</sup> *Taktika*, 18.129. Ῥωμαῖοις δὲ χρῆ οὐ μόνον ταῦτα ἐπιτηδεύειν, καὶ εὐψυχούς τῇ προαιρέσει καὶ στρατιώτας καὶ τοὺς οὐπω στρατευσαμένους συνεκστρατεύειν κατὰ τῶν βλασφημούντων τὸν πάντων βασιλέα Χριστὸν τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν, καὶ δι’ ἀπάντων ἐνδυναμοῦντα τοὺς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ στρατευομένους κατὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ὄπλοις, καὶ δώροις, καὶ ταῖς προτεμμητρίαις εὐχαῖς. (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.123, 482).

<sup>93</sup> *Taktika*, 18.129 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.123, 482).

<sup>94</sup> *Taktika*, 18.131 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.125, 484). μάλιστα τόξοις καὶ βέλεσι πλείστοις.

<sup>95</sup> For a book-length study on the disproportionate power generated by Byzantium, see E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

<sup>96</sup> *Taktika*, 18.127–8. *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 975B (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.119, 480).

narrow defiles of the Taurus mountains.<sup>97</sup> The Saracens fight steadfastly, even using Roman troop patterns, but when compelled to break their battle array cannot recover order, and are easily routed.<sup>98</sup> Breaking their ranks, though difficult (they do not fall for feigned withdrawal tricks) is imperative; otherwise, they launch the counterattack the moment Roman intensity falters, therefore, Leo advises his readers, do not be fooled by apparent meekness but maintain steady fire.<sup>99</sup> Some Saracens have insider knowledge of Roman military tactics from prior experience and the information of prisoners, so it remains prudent to develop Roman familiarity also with their manoeuvres.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, since Arabs make great use of cavalry, it behoves the Romans to stop their charge by using poisoned arrows to kill their horses (φάρια); the Saracens place high value on these apparently unarmoured fast-attack horses and know that by retreating to save their mounts, they will also save themselves.<sup>101</sup>

Roman victories are doubly potent, says Leo, because they not only exploit the fatalism of the Muslim faith<sup>102</sup> but also destroy the morale of the Arab armies by humiliating them – people who live and die by the sword – through military defeat.<sup>103</sup> On a higher strategic level, moreover, the ruin of the Cilician Saracens in particular can be achieved through a combined land and sea attack, since their soldiers do double duty as sailors and cannot both defend their homeland and mount a sea campaign simultaneously.<sup>104</sup> The *Taktika* also mentions that cowardly soldiers should be stationed on the lower oar-bank, and braver soldiers on the upper, implying that the Byzantines too were responsible for both fighting and rowing.<sup>105</sup> The key to successfully coordinated land and sea attacks, claims Leo, lies with reliable intelligence from Roman scouts.<sup>106</sup> This suggestion also reinforces Leo's purpose of providing practical advice for

<sup>97</sup> *Taktika*, 18.134 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.128, 484).

<sup>98</sup> *Taktika*, 18.116, 118–19 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.111, 18.113–14, 478).

<sup>99</sup> *Taktika*, 18.120–2 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.115–16, 480).

<sup>100</sup> *Taktika*, 18.123 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.114, 478).

<sup>101</sup> *Taktika*, 18.135–6 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.129, 484).

<sup>102</sup> *Taktika*, 18.117 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.112, 478). Cf. Haldon, *Commentary*, 358–9.

<sup>103</sup> *Taktika*, 18.137 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.130, 486).

<sup>104</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys make clear that the Byzantines had soldiers who could double as sailors. *Age of the Dromon*, 261.

<sup>105</sup> *Taktika*, 19.20. Leo's contention that the Muslim fleets functioned similarly is disputed by Christides, who argues from both Byzantine and Arabic sources that the primary difference between the fleets was 'the specialization of the Moslem crews' duties in contrast to the Byzantines' multi-knowledge'. V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984), 53–6.

<sup>106</sup> *Taktika*, 18.138–40 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.132–33, 486–8).



contemporary challenges, even where his information on Muslim military practices appears to be faulty.

### Arab Weapons

Weaponry and armour constitute one last consideration addressed by the emperor. Vital to the preparation of war is accurate information regarding what weapons one is likely to face in battle.<sup>107</sup> Leo enumerates the Arab panoply, adding ‘each one is equipped according to the Roman way’.<sup>108</sup>

Cavalry weapons consisted of bows (τόξα), swords (σπαθία), spears (κοντόριο), and axes (πελέκεις). The bow mentioned here was a composite bow, made of wood with a reinforcement of horn facing the archer and an outer layer of sinew. It functioned as a powerful ‘reflex’ bow and was standard issue equipment in Muslim armies from the time of the early conquests.<sup>109</sup> Unlike the Byzantines, archers in the Muslim world were held in high esteem; bows were not just for infantry, but were used also by cavalry. A formidable weapon, when equipped with the proper arrowhead, it could penetrate chain-mail at 150 metres.

Swords, the main weapon of both infantry and cavalry, ‘were the most highly esteemed of all weapons and were often given names’.<sup>110</sup> Since length, shape, and decoration varied according to the region of production, no ‘typical’ Islamic sword can be described. Very probably such swords were carried in shoulder sheaths, enabling a man to draw and use the weapon very fast, in an attacking downward stroke. More widely used and significantly less expensive, spears used by the cavalry ranged from two to seven metres in length; the shorter ones could also be thrown.<sup>111</sup> The heavy two-edged axes, however, were not thrown, but used for hacking at enemies in hand-to-hand combat.<sup>112</sup> The Byzantines, by contrast, issued lighter, single-edged throwing axes (τζικούριον) to the heavy infantry,<sup>113</sup> but this appears to be an innovation learned from the Franks.<sup>114</sup> Maurice does not mention axes, except with regard to the Persians, who did not throw them.

<sup>107</sup> For a bit more detail on Saracen weapons, see Haldon, *Commentary*, 357–8.

<sup>108</sup> *Taktika*, 18.115 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.110, 478). καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον κατὰ τὸν Ῥωμαϊκὸν τρόπον. Cf. D. Nicolle, *The Armies of Islam 7th–11th c.* (London, 1982), 15–16.

<sup>109</sup> D. R. Hill and A. Y. al-Hassan, *Islamic Technology: an illustrated history* (Cambridge, 1986), 98–9.

<sup>110</sup> Hill and al-Hassan, *Islamic Technology*, 96.

<sup>111</sup> T. G. Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen* (Vienna, 1988), 192; Hill and al-Hassan, *Islamic Technology*, 97.

<sup>112</sup> Kolias, *Waffen*, 168–9.

<sup>113</sup> *Taktika*, 7.67 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 7.3, 106).

<sup>114</sup> Kolias, *Waffen*, 165.

Arab defensive armour comprised cuirasses made of chain-mail (λωρίκια) or lamellar plating of horn or metal (κλιβάνια). Their helmets (κασσίδαι) were ‘shining, smooth helms without horsehair decoration’<sup>115</sup> possibly similar to ones worn by the Byzantines. In addition, the Arab cavalry wore greaves (ποδόψελλα) and gauntlets (χειρόψελλα). These same terms refer elsewhere in the *Taktika* to Byzantine equipment,<sup>116</sup> hence they were not entirely foreign to Leo’s audience.

### The Significance of Arab Equipment, Tactics, and Recruitment

Muslim recruitment patterns, specialized tactics, and details of weaponry and armour – the first three of Leo’s core points – are the areas that have traditionally received the most attention from Leo’s interpreters. However, it is in considering relations between the army and society that Leo’s contribution can be explored most fully. Dagron himself noted that Leo focuses on two Muslim innovations: justifying war using religion (*jihad*) and integrating warfare with the social structure (*waqf*).<sup>117</sup> This book argues that Leo’s solution for the Byzantine army goes further than merely imitating these two strategic policies. It represents a development of the use of religion beyond justifying war or supporting warriors: it is a fresh articulation of the Byzantine corporate identity, defined by the Byzantine view of Christianity. Leo does not address these three areas until after he has introduced the customary topos of the ‘simple Arab race’ and then, crucially, criticized the Islamic religion, both of which will be considered in the [next chapter](#). A brief review of the standard interpretation of the *Taktika*’s contribution is in order, however, before moving on to these further levels of interpretation.

Armament is clearly highly important, because without weapons, no army can effectively pursue its military mission. It seems clear that Leo included the references to Arab weaponry and armour as necessary, if not particularly newsworthy. The Byzantines had been facing Arab forces for nearly three centuries by the time Leo wrote the *Taktika*, so it is not surprising to find a large degree of influence in both directions. The primary difference according to Leo seems to be the importance of cavalry in the Arab army, because he specifically lists cavalry equipment.<sup>118</sup> The implicit

<sup>115</sup> Koliaş, *Waffen*, 75.

<sup>116</sup> *Taktika*, Constitutions 5 and 6.

<sup>117</sup> Dagron, ‘Byzance et le modèle islamique’, 221. Haldon, *Commentary*, 368–9.

<sup>118</sup> *Taktika*, 18.115 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.110, 476).

assumption is that his readers, the generals of the Byzantine armies, would already know what to expect in terms of infantry weapons. The primary distinguishing characteristic of the Arab cavalry, however, was their extensive use of thoroughbred horses. For this reason, Leo counsels the use of poisoned arrows, rightly grasping the value of the Arabian mounts.<sup>119</sup> It seems likely that the Arabs deployed equal numbers of cavalry and infantry for border warfare, since Leo notes that the infantry ride on horseback behind the cavalry 'whenever they are near their country going out on campaign'.<sup>120</sup>

Following their example, Leo also recommends that Byzantine infantry ride double with the cavalry where possible.<sup>121</sup> Byzantine armies had previously maintained a ratio of about one-fifth cavalry, which Leo increased to one-fourth.<sup>122</sup> Some themes had higher proportions of infantry, but along the eastern border, the armies were at least one-quarter cavalry, no doubt in order to match the threat posed by the high proportion of Arab cavalry. Leo mentions the bow as the first weapon of the Arab cavalry, primarily because of its power and range. The impact of skilled Arab mounted archers was tremendous, because the composite bow used by Arabs was 'the most effective weapon developed before the invention of firearms'.<sup>123</sup> Byzantines were therefore obliged to adapt to the fast and deadly tactics of Arab cavalry, usually by resorting to the ambush techniques of 'shadow warfare' in order to maintain the integrity of Byzantium's borders.

However important weapons and tactics might be, the issue of recruitment receives higher priority. If there are too few soldiers to equip, the weaponry they use and the tactics they pursue will be moot. In other words, Leo says, Arab military success is due to a superior application of theological resolve, specifically in their recruitment practices. Where the Byzantines somewhat grudgingly supported the military, and censured soldiers for spilling blood, even when necessary, Muslim theology apparently rewarded all Arabs for their efforts, in particular making civilian support equivalent to religious observance. Dargon expresses doubts as to whether it was

<sup>119</sup> *Taktika*, 18.135–6 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.129, 484).

<sup>120</sup> *Taktika*, 18.115 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.110, 476). ὅτε πλησίον τῆς αὐτῶν χώρας ἔστιν ἡ ἐκστρατεία αὐτῶν.

<sup>121</sup> *Taktika*, 20.206 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 1069B). Dennis, 611.

<sup>122</sup> W. T. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081* (Redwood City, CA, 1995), 106. Cf. *Taktika* 18.143, 145, 149 on the command structure of an army of 4000 picked men (Dennis, *Taktika*, 18.139–41, 18.146, 492–6).

<sup>123</sup> Hill and al-Hassan, *Islamic Technology*, 99.

realistic to adapt to the Islamic model, which he characterizes as ‘imprécis et déjà dépassé’.<sup>124</sup> However, Shepard notes,

Leo probably appreciated how much the running of his army in the provinces depended on officers’ local connections and resources. The rank-and-file did not receive substantial regular cash wages, and Leo’s *Tactica* discusses how to ensure a high turn-out of well-drilled soldiery after a call to arms. His solution is a combination of fiscal privileges for the soldiers with the arousal of religious fervour throughout provincial society, so that non-combatants would be predisposed to contribute unstintingly to the war effort. [18.128–33]<sup>125</sup>

Leo’s attention to the salaries and fiscal benefits of Byzantine soldiers was directly related to his understanding of the inequities they faced on the battlefield. In the constitution on naval warfare, he reiterates that sailors ought to be paid regularly and promptly.<sup>126</sup>

Leo’s prescriptions were designed to reform the Byzantine army, especially its recruitment practices, through a considered application of practical theology.<sup>127</sup> His exhortation to the Romans is expressed conditionally: ‘If (εἰ δὲ), with God’s aid on our side, well-armed and in good tactical formation, we battle virtuously and valiantly for the salvation of our souls, fighting for God himself, for family and for our other Christian brothers, and place our hopes unhesitatingly in God, [then] we will not fail but succeed and will certainly achieve victory over them.’<sup>128</sup> The emperor notices the effectiveness of Muslim practical theology, which, however misguided he might consider the doctrine, results in a noticeably more efficient social arrangement to the benefit of the Arab fighting forces, and counters it with the moral superiority of Christianity.

## Conclusion

The key to Byzantine victory, says Leo, will be a well-supplied, religiously motivated fighting force. This is Dagron’s interpretation of the *Taktika*,

<sup>124</sup> Dagron, ‘Byzance et le modèle islamique’, 224.

<sup>125</sup> J. Shepard, ‘Byzantium in Equilibrium, 886–944’, in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, 1999a), 3: 558.

<sup>126</sup> *Taktika*, 19.79. Dennis, 534.

<sup>127</sup> Dagron, ‘Byzance et le modèle islamique’, 224.

<sup>128</sup> *Taktika*, 18.133, emphasis added. Εἰ δὲ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῖν συμμαχοῦσης βοηθείας καλῶς ὀπλισάμενοι καὶ παραταξάμενοι, καὶ καλῶς καὶ εὐψύχως προσβάλλοντες αὐτοῖς, ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχικῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας ὡς καὶ ὑπὲρ Θεοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ συγγενῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Χριστιανῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν ἀγωνιζόμενοι, ἀνενδοιάστως τὰς εἰς Θεὸν ἐλπίδας ἔχομεν, οὐκ ἀποτευξόμεθα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπιτευξόμεθα τῶν κατ’ ἐκείνων πάντως νικητηρίων.

and its most original contribution to Byzantine military science in terms of strategy. And that is correct, as far as it goes, but there is much more to the story.

One must ask, how does Leo's new material, rightly identified by Dagron, fit together with the rest of the *Taktika*? Is this manual merely the product of earlier material stitched together by rote, yet curiously interrupted by the surprisingly new and original contributions of Constitution 18 (and 19)? The *Taktika* as a military manual has been placed in its historical context earlier in this chapter to help the modern reader understand its import. But what about the context of the *Taktika* itself, as a text in which Constitution 18 is situated?

The [following chapter](#) explores the larger purpose and message of the *Taktika* as a whole. In particular, Leo's theological language and fundamental interest in religion, characteristic of his literary output in general, will be examined. This analysis contends that these features are not the 'white noise' that so many scholars have tacitly suggested (by ignoring them), but are integral to the purpose, shape, and central thrust of the *Taktika*. The [next chapter](#) places the Prologue, Epilogue, and Constitutions 2 and 20 of the *Taktika* under the microscope to map more accurately Leo's unique approach. By subsequently 'zooming out', one can then appreciate Leo's view of the Saracens and the role played by Constitution 18 in a fresh way, and better understand how it fits with the overall purpose of the *Taktika* as a theological, military, and imperial text.

*The Byzantine Christian Approach to War*

The *Taktika* is not just about recruitment, nor about weapons, nor is it merely an homage to the emperor Maurice and his well-known *Strategikon*. It is intended to be useful, and indeed, generals of the tenth-century reconquest embraced and expanded its precepts.<sup>1</sup> Leo states three times that he was spurred to write the book because of the Saracen threat, and the apparently unsatisfactory Byzantine defence, yet he does not offer much in terms of new tactics to counter a new enemy.<sup>2</sup> Most previous analyses of the *Taktika* have been limited to discrete aspects of this immense work, primarily to Leo's expositions on strategy, either in the realm of naval tactics (Pryor on Constitution 19) or recruitment policies (Dagron on Constitution 18). More recently, Haldon's commentary on the text has presented a comprehensive and detailed line-by-line analysis, providing a thorough reference work to accompany Dennis's translation. The present work rather less ambitiously seeks to highlight one integral facet of the book with a view towards reconsidering Leo's more general purposes for it as a whole in terms of the incorporation of ideological elements.

Why did Leo VI, a scholarly civilian with no military experience, write a military manual at all? Was he merely adding sparkle to the glory of his own literary posterity? Did he really have the hubris to believe that he could better instruct experienced, professional *strategoï* on how to do their jobs? In the text itself he claims several purposes. It was written, he says, to improve Roman tactics in the face of an aggressive enemy,<sup>3</sup> to educate Byzantine generals on military science,<sup>4</sup> and to bolster morale.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the emperor addresses the superior methods of Muslim recruitment and

<sup>1</sup> In recent years, much of the best scholarship on the topic of religion and warfare in Byzantium has been published by the gifted Ioannis Stouraitis (see [Bibliography](#)).

<sup>2</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue, 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Taktika*, Prologue, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Taktika*, 20.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 21.

motivation,<sup>6</sup> and records ancient military maxims.<sup>7</sup> Although his military manual discusses strategy, tactics, received wisdom from earlier eras, and the problem of Saracen military success, Leo's primary interest and expertise is manifestly not in those things. For him, Byzantine military success finds its true foundation in Christian theology and the advantages that accrue to those who believe in the Orthodox Christian God.<sup>8</sup> It 'is also quite clear that the nature of the Islamic enemy, and of Islamic concepts of religiously motivated warfare and divine reward for fighting for the faith, were a major concern for Leo'.<sup>9</sup> Compiling and annotating the strategies and tactics of previous military manuals provided the vehicle for him to set out a distinctly Byzantine philosophy of warfare. Above all, Leo was a pious emperor who wanted to expound principles for pursuing warfare within the context of Orthodox Christian faith.

Leo writes within a theological framework that reflects his Christian worldview. The [previous chapter](#) discussed the originality of Leo's contribution on the subject of the Saracens in Constitution 18. This chapter focuses on material in the Prologue, Epilogue, Constitution 2, and Constitution 20, which together reveal the contours of Leo's thinking. He has deliberately placed his most intensely religion-oriented material at the beginning and end of this book, structurally emphasizing both the extent and the boundaries of his faith-defined intellectual universe. It is from this perspective that his recommended solution to the Saracens in Constitution 18 reveals itself in a different light.

Leo does not present his material in an explicit or linear fashion. He does not present topics in a sequential order like Western thinkers do. Rather, he arranges material thematically and revisits the same topics from different angles. This makes it more difficult to systematize his thinking, but a general description of these overlapping circles can be attempted. Different parts of related topics are linked with others, forming a complex web of connections, sort of a Venn diagram of his thinking. For example, Constitution 2 (on the qualities of the general), Constitution 20 (various maxims), and the Epilogue all begin with exhortations addressed to the general. Constitution 20 provides Leo's admonitions on the specific role

<sup>6</sup> *Taktika*, 18.129.

<sup>7</sup> *Taktika*, 20.1.

<sup>8</sup> See Haldon's summary of this argument, citing M. L. D. Riedel, 'A Christian Philosophy of Warfare? Internal Evidence for the Shape and Purpose of the *Taktika* of Leo VI', Byzantine Studies Conference, Chicago, 11 (October 2011) and Riedel, 'Fighting the Good Fight: The "*Taktika*" of Leo VI and Its Influence on Byzantine Cultural Identity' (unpublished DPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 2010). (*Commentary*, 22, notes 54 and 55).

<sup>9</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 24.

of the general and is closely related to the Epilogue, which presents Leo's theological principles for Byzantine military success, in which the general is the second most important person after the emperor. The Epilogue and Constitution 2, meanwhile, present different but complementary information on the person of the general, while Constitution 20 and the Prologue share an important theological formula. The Prologue, the Epilogue, and Constitution 18 together present Leo's immediate concern (the Saracen threat), his chief interest (theology), and the key to his proposed solution (the piety of the general) in a way that addresses the fundamental corporate identity of the Byzantines in contrast to the Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

### The Prologue

The text of the *Taktika* opens, as one would expect, with the name of the author and the title of his work: 'Leo in Christ [God] autokrator, a brief account of tactics in war'.<sup>11</sup> This is followed by a sort of invocation that reads: 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the holy and consubstantial and worshipped Trinity of our one and only true God, and of Leo the peaceful autokrator in Christ, faithful, pious, ever-worthy ruler'.<sup>12</sup> Invoking the Trinity at the start of imperial documents is not unusual; the practice had been officially decreed by Maurice, and indeed used at the beginning of his *Strategikon*, though in a slightly different form.<sup>13</sup> However, no other Byzantine military treatise opens with a prayer, much less one invoking the Trinity. The *Taktika* is also different from the *Strategikon* in that it ends with an 'amen', emphasizing its religious orientation.<sup>14</sup> Notably, the only other manual to end with an 'amen' is the later tenth-century manual on skirmishing, which is attributed to Nikephoros II Phokas (d.969). Nikephoros likely read Leo's manual and sought to embody Leo's description of the ideal general as presented in the

<sup>10</sup> Riedel, 'Fighting', 118–19; Haldon, *Commentary*, 28–30.

<sup>11</sup> Λέοντος ἐν Χριστῷ [τῷ Θεῷ] αὐτοκράτορος τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδοσις. The earlier Laurentian manuscript, used by Dennis, does not have τῷ Θεῷ after Χριστῷ.

<sup>12</sup> Ἐν ὀνοματί τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου καὶ προσκυνητῆς τριάδος, τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ παναληθινοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν, Λέων ὁ εἰρηνικός ἐν Χριστῷ αὐτοκράτωρ πιστὸς, εὐσεβής, ἀειεβαστος αὐγουστος.

<sup>13</sup> G. T. Dennis (tr.), *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1984), 8, n.1. Cf. J. Wiita, 'The *Ethnika* in Byzantine Military Treatises', PhD dissertation (University of Minnesota, 1977), 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 73. The *Strategikon* has an amen just after the opening comments in the prologue. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*, 8. Notably, the only other manual to end with an 'amen' is the later tenth-century manual on skirmishing, which is attributed to Nikephoros II Phokas, a general whose character and abilities closely fit Leo's description of the ideal.



*Taktika*. The *Taktika* is a book imbued with legislative force, and shaped like a religious treatise.

What is interesting about Leo's prologue is the inclusion of the word 'consubstantial' (ὁμοουσίου). In using this term, Leo is trumpeting his christological orthodoxy; it was concerning precisely this doctrine that the conflict raged at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451.<sup>15</sup> One might ask, what is the vestige of an ecclesiastical debate doing in a military manual? Although the Orthodox doctrine on the nature of Christ had been determined in the fifth century, at the close of the ninth century there were still many Christians who held a different view. Most of them lived on the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire, the very region whence sprang the Saracen threat that, at least in part, galvanized him to write the *Taktika*. By using this christological term, Leo is subtly asserting his authority as the spiritual leader of the empire and divinely chosen representative of God. It also signals his attention to theological detail, and specifically the orthodox framework of his worldview.<sup>16</sup> Here is an emperor who does not merely employ customary religious phrases but tailors them to communicate his ecclesiastical stance with greater precision even than strictly necessary.

### Prologue and Constitution 20

Constitution 20 opens with a description of its contents: it is a list of diverse maxims (Περὶ διαφόρων γνωμικῶν κεφαλαίων). Section 1 then explains the purpose for this collection of maxims:

After the foregoing commands and constitutions that I have just given you, ὁ general, you will now pay attention to the following maxims I have gathered from several authors on account of their authority and brevity. This will be another way to hone your command of military science, as Solomon says: 'he who has wisdom profits from the opportunity to learn more.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The conflict was over the relationship of the divine and human natures of Christ and whether they were 'of the same essence' (ὁμοούσιος) or 'of similar essences' (ὁμοιούσιος). The former, called the hypostatic union, was determined to be the orthodox view, but not before the clerics were accused of fighting over a 'jot', that is, the iota that marks the only morphological difference between the two words.

<sup>16</sup> It could also perhaps signal his iconophile views in a post-iconoclast era where some still affirmed iconoclasm. For more on the influence of Photios, Leo's tutor, in this debate, see D. M. Gwynn, 'From Iconoclasm to Arianism: The Construction of Christian Tradition in the Iconoclast Controversy', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007), 225–51, esp. 248–51.

<sup>17</sup> Μετὰ δὲ τὰς εἰρημέναις παραγγελίαις τε καὶ διατάξεις, ὧ στρατηγέ, χρεῶν τῇ σῇ ἐνδοξότητι καὶ ταῖς ἡδὴ ῥηθησομέναις ἐγκρύψαι γνώμαις, ἃς ἐκ πολλῶν παλαιῶν καὶ στρατηγικῶν συνταγμάτων ἀναλεξάμενοι συνόψεως χάριν τῶν εἰρημένων ἐνταῦθα παρατεθείκαμεν. Ἐκ τούτων γὰρ καὶ ἐπι

Beginning in 20.2, the invocation of the Prologue is repeated, with minor variations, in a distinctive form. The initial letters of Constitution 20.2–221 are arranged to form an acrostic that reads: ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the holy and consubstantial and worshipped Trinity of our one and only true God, and of Leo the peaceful autokrator in Christ, faithful, pious, gracious ever-worthy ruler and [...] emperor of the Romans’.<sup>18</sup>

The acrostic of Constitution 20 forms nearly the same invocation as the opening of the Prologue, that is, the Chalcedonian formula and Leo’s name, with two small changes. In the Prologue, Leo’s name and the title of the book are listed in the nominative, followed by the Chalcedonian formula and Leo’s name again, both in the genitive. Constitution 20 omits the author and title of the prologue, and includes only the Chalcedonian formula and Leo’s name (both in the genitive). Instead of παναληθινοῦ Θεοῦ as in the prologue, Constitution 20 has μόνου ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ; and Leo’s title at the end is longer in Constitution 20, adding after αὔγουστος a corrupted section followed by Βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων.

Grosdidier de Matons has argued convincingly that this corrupted section originally formed the name of Alexander, the brother and successor of Leo, but was ‘written out’ of the acrostic signature.<sup>19</sup> Although convincing and interesting, his argument addresses only the mechanics of the *damnatio memoriae* of Alexander. It does not consider the theological significance of the acrostic at all.

τὰς μείζονας πράξεις τῆς τακτικῆς θεωρίας ἀναβῆναι δυνήσῃ, κατὰ τὸν σοφὸν Παροιμιαστὴν βασιλέα· Σοφῶ γὰρ ἀνδρὶ ἀφορμὴ διδομένη σοφώτερον ἀπεργάζεται. The quote from Solomon conflates two verses in the book of Proverbs (1:5; 20:5).

<sup>18</sup> Ἐν ὀνοματι τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου καὶ προσκυνητῆς τριάδος, τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ μόνου ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν, Λέων ὁ εἰρηνικός ἐν Χριστῶ αὐτοκράτωρ πιστὸς εὐσεβὴς εὐμενὴς ἀεισέβαστος αὔγουστος καὶ (τ ο ω Α Θπννιοα) Βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων. The formula is glaringly Chalcedonian, as evidenced by the use of the word ὁμοουσίου, an interesting feature given that nowhere in the book between here and its first mention in the Prologue is the Orthodox christological view explicitly stated. It is also, notably, the doctrine most criticized by Muslim writers. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, ‘Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity’, *Harvard Theological Review* 89.1 (1996): 61–84; David Thomas (ed. and tr.), *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abu ‘Isa al-Warraaq’s ‘Against the Trinity’* (Cambridge, 1992); David Thomas, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era,’ in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (New York, 2001), 83f. H. A. Wolfson, ‘The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity’, *Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956), 1–18.

<sup>19</sup> There is no reason to believe that Alexander had anything to do with the composition of the book, particularly since he had a bad reputation. J. Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Trois études sur Léon VI’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1973), 229–42. Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, ‘The Emperor Alexander’s Bad Name’, *Speculum* 44 (1969), 585–96.

Acrostics are a characteristic feature of Byzantine liturgical poems, and serve as a sort of ‘signature de l’auteur’.<sup>20</sup> They appear also in parainetic texts, mirrors of princes, and gnomologies, thus it is entirely fitting that Leo put one in a list of general maxims.<sup>21</sup> The one in Constitution 20 indicates the author’s name, in Leo’s pious manner, rather than the subject matter or a mere alphabet.<sup>22</sup> If it is functioning, as one would expect for a prose acrostic, as a ‘signature’ for the book, then it is worth noting that unlike the opening of the Prologue, it offers first the name of the Trinity (ὄνοματι τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) and then the name of Leo. The implication is that the information in the manual originated in some fashion in the Godhead and then came through the Trinity’s earthly representative, the emperor. In other words, as something ‘written’ by God, the manual is to be read and accepted as important, reliable, truthful, and mandatory.<sup>23</sup> Obviously it cannot be on a par with the Bible, and even Leo admits that it is not a comprehensive book, but only a guide that offers a trajectory:

As for all the other topics that naturally crop up in each period of war or of preparation for it, and especially against the Saracen nation now causing us trouble – on whose account, as we have said, the present book has been compiled – even if we have not been able to take up everything, still, from what has been written, as well as from experience acquired, and from the very nature of things, you must form estimates to the extent possible and accommodate yourself to the situations that arise. I do not think it possible, either for us or for anyone else to write about everything that is likely to happen, so as to be on one’s guard against everything, seeing that the diverse circumstances in each case are unlimited in number.<sup>24</sup>

However, throughout the text this emperor proves himself a genuinely pious man, deeply interested in God, and also in God’s relationship to all Byzantine citizens, but especially soldiers, as the Epilogue shows. Leo’s orthodox theological framework as it appears in the Prologue and is

<sup>20</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Trois études’, 231.

<sup>21</sup> E. M. Jeffreys, ‘Acrostic (ἀκροστιχίς)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1991), 1: 15. For parainetic texts: D. N. Anastasijewic, *Die paraenetischen Alphabete in der griechischen Literatur* (Munich 1905); and K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)* (Munich, 1897), 2: 717–20. For mirrors of princes: H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 1: 158.

<sup>22</sup> K. Krumbacher, ‘Die Akrostichis in der griechischen Kirchenpoesie’, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch[-philologische] und historische Klasse* (Munich, 1903), 551–691. Commonly, acrostics formed the title, author, or alphabet.

<sup>23</sup> Riedel, ‘Fighting’, 122. Haldon, *Commentary*, 419.

<sup>24</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 71 (Dennis, 643). The humility of this recommended trajectory is an adaptation of the conclusion of Maurice’s *Strategikon* at the end of Book XI.

cleverly repeated in the last constitution reveals a text intended to designate the Christian faith as the beginning and end of all Byzantine military science.

### Constitution 18 Reconsidered

Constitution 18, when considered within the context of the entire book, appears differently than when examined in isolation. The envelope of the book, that is, the Epilogue and the Prologue, helps to put Leo's ethnographic excursus into perspective. The Epilogue is nothing less than a theologically driven treatise, tailored for achieving a military objective: effective warfare through high morale by means of Christian faith. It is, as advertised, a brief summary of nearly the entire book, distilled into the principles and theory that Leo considered most pertinent to achieving his goal of building a stronger army. It begins with a brief exposition of the theological foundation underpinning the entire military endeavour, followed by the point that Leo considers of primary importance: the need to consult God before speaking or acting. This is a theme of Leo's vision for military success. In Constitution 20 he had already exhorted the general to remember that when making camp, 'God is your first line of defence.'<sup>25</sup> However, in the Epilogue, he reiterates his concern 'because of the Saracen race now troubling us'.<sup>26</sup>

This same reason is offered in both the Prologue and in Constitution 18, and gives the reader a firm indication that the *Taktika* was not a mere literary project for a dilettante in leadership. On a practical level, the emperor felt compelled to address an obvious problem: the troubling success of Saracen attacks. On an intellectual level, he could only offer a theological solution, although he marshalled all the resources of his scholarly arsenal to research and present what he describes as 'a brief account of tactics in war'.<sup>27</sup> And indeed, on the face of it, this book is about tactics.

However, since Leo has very little to add to the tactics already used by Byzantine forces, he focuses his efforts on editing Maurice and Onasander, rearranging their material in such a way as to allow him to emphasize what he was most interested in, which is his Christian worldview. This is evident in the way that he adds his own perspective on the Christian dimension of

<sup>25</sup> *Taktika*, 20.40.

<sup>26</sup> *Taktika*, 20.71.

<sup>27</sup> τὸν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδοσις. *Taktika*, Prologue. (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 672C) Dennis, 2.

a general's character at the end of Constitution 2. It can also be seen in how Leo chooses to divide the material from Maurice, putting the half that is borrowed from Onasander into Constitution 2 and using the larger part to form a trinitarian acrostic in Constitution 20. To reiterate his commitment to an Orthodox Christian perspective, the Epilogue with its summary review of the whole book, plus the Prologue with its emphasis on the emperor's physical and spiritual care of all Byzantines, together form a coherent theological framework. It is from within this framework that Leo's remarks on the Saracens in Constitution 18 are grounded. In the context of the book as a whole, the reader can better appreciate the contrast that Leo deliberately and starkly draws between Byzantine Orthodoxy and Saracen Islam.

Constitution 18 reveals Leo's agenda in the section that deals specifically with the Saracen enemy. Here he is anxious to draw the contrast with Islam. However, he does this with his primary purposes in mind: engaging military success through morale and morale through religious contrast. In other words, he is not describing Islam because he wants to educate his reader, the ideal general, on the principles of the Muslim faith. Rather, he describes it in terms that will contribute to encouraging those who must face Muslim warriors in battle: he denigrates them, and he emphasizes that their faith is blasphemy, implying that the reward of Christian soldiers is more secure than the reward they knew their opponents were anticipating. If one now turns back to this material, outlined in the [previous chapter](#), Leo's perspective becomes clearer as it is considered with this larger framework in mind. In particular, it is worth taking a fresh look at Leo's ethnographic excursus, his view of the Muslim religion, and his presentation of contrasting Byzantine Christian identity.

### The 'Simple Arab' Ploy

Why does Leo reproduce the simple racial stereotypes he finds in Maurice? Does he believe, contrary to experience, that Arabs cannot fight in the rain?<sup>28</sup> It cannot be the case that the exaggerations are meant to be literal. Rather, they communicate a shared view of the 'otherness' of the enemy. Surely an Asian *strategos*, brought up in the harsh conditions of the Anatolian plain, would snicker at the thought of a fair-weather soldier. Certainly his experience of winter raids would offer more immediate information on the Arab enemy that effectively nullified the literary topos repeated in

<sup>28</sup> 'This people is hurt by cold, by winter, and by heavy rain.' *Taktika* 18.118 (Dennis, 481).

the *Taktika*. The Muslim historian al-Tabarī mentions both winter raids and campaigns, and even a night attack by Arabs against the Byzantines.<sup>29</sup> From the seventh century, the Muslims had proven that they could fight in cold weather, contrary to arrogant Byzantine assumptions about them (as about the Persians).<sup>30</sup> Kaegi notes, ‘Muslim winter expeditions into Anatolia brought home to the Byzantines just how wrong their notions about Muslim warfare could be. Winter campaigns ... unquestionably disrupted the Byzantines’ way of life in Asia Minor and kept them on the defensive.’<sup>31</sup>

An emperor with a scholarly bent like Leo VI would surely have been familiar with the historical record, and therefore realized that these simple characterizations were not accurate. These literary topoi fail to communicate practical or accurate information, as history demonstrates. So why use them? This question may not be terribly fruitful; one may as well ask why any ancient writer used literary topoi. Possibilities range from the desire to demonstrate erudition, to the pressure of cultural literary expectation, to perhaps merely because the author enjoyed it. No matter his reason, one may observe that Leo’s rhetoric in terms of his use of topoi was entirely consonant with his historical context. Indeed, in his writing, Leo elsewhere follows the rhetorical advice of Menander Rhetor, whose primary dicta were that literary compositions ought to be accessible to a general audience and that language itself could be a source of unity.<sup>32</sup>

If the entire book is at its core intended to make a difference in the military engagements between Arabs and Byzantines, then one of its primary aims must necessarily be related to morale. Leo was facing increased pressure from the sea, as well as attritional warfare on the eastern frontier; therefore he announced in the prologue to his military manual that he intends to present a solution for Byzantium’s battered forces. As the second-born prince groomed for an intellectual life, rather different to the training offered his older brother Constantine, who was prepared for the rough and tumble of imperial and military leadership, it should come as no surprise that Leo’s response was to research the current state of knowledge by reading books and consulting with experts, i.e. military generals. He

<sup>29</sup> *History of Al-Tabarī* 44, 46–9, 52–9 (tr. P. M. Fields (New York, 1987), 18: 71, 88, 91, 93–4, 165–6, 172, 180, 183, 191–2, 199).

<sup>30</sup> On the Persians, see Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*, xi.1.

<sup>31</sup> W. E. Kaegi, ‘Confronting Islam: Emperors versus Caliphs (641–c.850)’, in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c.500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 373.

<sup>32</sup> M. Vinson, ‘Rhetoric and Writing Strategies in the Ninth Century’, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Farnham, 2003) 9–22 at 17 and 21.

was spurred, as he says, to write the manual specifically on account of the grim military situation vis-à-vis the Saracens, as he calls them.<sup>33</sup> Further, as an emperor who had been given a religious education, he sought illumination in the tenets of Christianity and wanted to highlight the contrast with Islam. This leads to a central question about Leo VI: Did he know anything about Arab Muslims or the Islamic faith, and if so, what was the extent of his understanding?

Contact between Byzantium and the caliphate had been confined in the ninth century mostly to warfare and prisoner exchanges, and the inevitable diplomatic contacts associated with the latter.<sup>34</sup> However, the ninth century also witnessed an unusual exchange in the realm of ideas and scholarship, specifically the translation of books from Greek into Arabic (mostly philosophical works) and from Arabic into Greek (mostly medical and scientific works). As a scholar and a prince, Leo would have had access to these translations.<sup>35</sup> Considering his lifelong interest in religion, Leo would have read the books that were being written in Byzantium about Muslim religion and culture, and likely would have had access to Arabic books through the services of the imperial corps of interpreters. Translation services then as now were expensive, thus an emperor with access to imperial wealth would have had the means to obtain what he needed.<sup>36</sup> There is little doubt that there were Arabic-speakers in Constantinople.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the inherited theological tradition from Arab Christians was also partially known in Byzantium by the end of the ninth century, highlighting traditional points of contact in Christian–Muslim interreligious dialogue.

<sup>33</sup> *Taktika*, 18.42 (Dennis, 18.103–104), Epilogue 71.

<sup>34</sup> On translations: M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources* (Leiden, 2002); on diplomatic contacts: S. Franklin and J. Shepard (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990* (Aldershot, 1992) and P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot, 1994); on warfare: M. Canard, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient* (London, 1973) and H. Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, 2004). More recently, on prisoner exchanges: Y. Rotman, 'Byzance face à l'Islam arabe, VII<sup>e</sup>–X<sup>e</sup> siècle. D'un droit territorial à l'identité par la foi', *Annales* 60 (2005), 767–88.

<sup>35</sup> For more on the imperial library, see Nigel Wilson, 'The Libraries of the Byzantine World', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 8.1 (1967): 53–80 esp. 53–7. See also C. Mango, 'The Availability of Books in the Byzantine Empire, AD 750–850', *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Washington, DC, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> For more on the high cost of translations, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (London, 1998), 136–41, esp. 139.

<sup>37</sup> G. Dagron, 'Formes et fonctions du pluralisme linguistique à Byzance (IX<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)', *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), 219–40.

Dagron characterizes Leo's knowledge of Islam as 'fragmentaire, dépassée, sans doute livresque'.<sup>38</sup> Beyond reading books, Leo could certainly also have learned something about Islam from more immediate sources.

He was certainly aware of the possible contributions of foreigners at his court; he introduced the participation of Arab prisoners at banquets in Constantinople, an innovation that may have triggered the composition of the *Kletorologion* (c.899), to reflect the changes in precedence.<sup>39</sup> Harun ibn Yahya, a Muslim prisoner captured at Ascalon in the early tenth century, records that Muslims who attended these banquets were offered special fare, stipulated free of pork; thus revealing a knowledge and sensitivity in Leo's court about Islamic dietary regulations.<sup>40</sup> Trade contacts were maintained between Byzantium and the caliphate, with Byzantine generals urged to use travelling merchants as spies.<sup>41</sup> The *Taktika* refers in a number of places specifically to the duties and use of spies, and a tenth-century military treatise suggests the existence of a complex spy network in the border themes.<sup>42</sup> Later in Leo's reign, he did not hesitate to promote an Arab prisoner captured from Melitene to very high political rank among his advisors. These facts do not indicate an emperor entirely ignorant of either Muslim culture or belief. Although it is still possible that Leo's knowledge was partial, given that he never travelled outside Constantinople, there is every reason to believe that he was relatively well informed with regard to Byzantium's perennial enemy.

So why does he write in his *Taktika* that the Arabs are simple folk? Is it because he is merely copying a topos from Maurice? This cannot be, because this comment is located in an original section of Leo's manual, and there is no mention of Arabs in Maurice's book in any case.<sup>43</sup> The stated objective of the *Taktika* is to renew military science in Byzantium, and there is no reason to doubt what the emperor says in the preamble about his objectives. One of the ways to strengthen an army is to reinforce its

<sup>38</sup> G. Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au X<sup>e</sup> siècle: À propos des constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI', *Comptes rendus de l'academie des inscriptions de belles lettres* (1983), 242.

<sup>39</sup> L. Simeonova, 'In the Depths of Tenth-Century Ceremonial: The Treatment of Arab Prisoners of War at Imperial Banquets' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 22 (1998), 74–103. See also A. A. Vasiliev, 'Harun ibn Yahya and His Description of Constantinople', *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 5 (Prague, 1932), 149–63.

<sup>40</sup> Vasiliev, 'Harun Ibn Yahya and his description of Constantinople', 157.

<sup>41</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 42, 44.

<sup>42</sup> *Taktika*, 704D, 844B, 777A, 937B, 704D, 1024C, 940A, 837C–D, 844D, 941C–D, 709B–C, 828B, 980C–D, 1000C (naval spies). Dennis, *Taktika*, 4.26; 17.80; 18.132. J. F. Haldon (ed. and tr.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae, 28 (Vienna, 1990), 85–6.

<sup>43</sup> The only military manual before Leo's that mentions the Arabs is the Anonymous Treatise (see Dennis, *Three Treatises*), XL.I in the context of ambushes, and probably refers to the Ghassanids.



superiority in any way possible, including the soldiers' view of their enemy. This is perhaps even more important in a time of back-and-forth military engagements, when it was not obvious that Byzantium's armies might not prevail. One of the pieces of advice he gives to his generals elsewhere in the *Taktika* is to withhold news of defeats but to celebrate victories.<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, Leo can say that the Arabs have effective recruitment and supply policies, and even more impressive horses and weapons, but are nonetheless not to be feared because they are merely simple folk motivated by the possibility of plunder and posthumous glory. There is a subtle (or perhaps not so subtle) denigration of the enemy, despite their fast horses, effective archery skills, and supportive social structure.

The method in Leo's madness is that he is after improving not only tactics but also morale. In the Epilogue, he urges the general, 'You must, in advance of the dangers, correctly incline the hearts and minds (τὰς ψυχὰς) of the soldiers towards the doctrines usefully proposed here.'<sup>45</sup> In using the word here translated 'doctrines' (δόξας), Leo refers to a certain way of thinking, a system of belief. One might rightly ask whether the phrase τὰς παρούσας δόξας χρησίμως does not refer to glory, as Dennis renders it: 'the glory awaiting them'.<sup>46</sup> The answer is that the emperor is not interested in promoting the sort of battlefield morale that is characteristic of the Islamic faith: a hope in glory that comes for those who die in battle. His focus is rather that the soldiers get their courage from specifically Christian beliefs, which do not centre on posthumous glory, but rather on right doctrines, which Leo describes here as 'useful' (χρησίμως). As the emperor has noted, here and elsewhere, useful doctrines are those that lead to victory and life, not merely glorious death. Leo's manual thus enjoins the engagement of the heart and mind by means of a specific perspective in order to raise confidence – in other words, the establishment of morale.

What sort of morale does he propose? Soldiers must be confident that their enemy can be beaten, even after many setbacks. This confidence is a crucial factor in any military conflict. In the absence of the Roman juggernaut of late antiquity, Leo VI appears to have thought hard about the problem of morale, dedicating his manual to reviving Byzantine boldness in the face of a formidable and tenacious enemy. It is a short step from encouraging morale through changing the army's perspective on the

<sup>44</sup> *Taktika*, 20.8, 14, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Χρή οὖν πρὸ τῶν κινδύνων μεθαρμόζειν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν στρατιωτῶν πρὸς τὰς παρούσας δόξας χρησίμως. (Epilogue 23).

<sup>46</sup> Dennis, 627.

enemy to building up confidence by recalibrating the army's perspective on themselves. For both sides of his argument, he employs theological language. He discusses the right way to view the enemy (Saracens) primarily in Constitution 18, and there he also mentions briefly the advantages of the Christian faith held by the Byzantines. He then summarizes in the Epilogue the key points of his religiously conditioned perspective on successful military leadership in general. The Epilogue is thus a précis of the entire manual, beginning with the theological foundation that Leo considered essential for success on the battlefield, and ending with a prayer.

### Leo's Perspective on Islam: Who Is God?

In his brief but damning description of the Muslim faith in Constitution 18, Leo draws a stark contrast between the two religions. He does not pretend to be impartial, even a little, but makes his argument from a firmly Christian position, highlighting three primary differences. Both the Muslim Arabs and the Christian Byzantines cleave to a monotheistic faith, although Muslims might dispute this claim on their understanding of the concept of the Trinity in Christian theology. Leo begins his critique from that starting point: both faiths profess one God; but he excoriates the Muslims as impious, because they claim piety while practising blasphemy, in that they deny the divinity of Christ. It is the identity of the one God, predictably, where Leo draws the first distinction.<sup>47</sup> However, this amounts to no more than accusing them of not being Christians, something one would have thought self-evident. Why did he consider it necessary to repeat an apparent truism? What was the 'cash value' of such a remark in terms of improving the Byzantine army's effectiveness?

By the later ninth century, it was clear that Islam and Christianity were different religions, but in the environment of the multi-ethnic Arab–Byzantine frontier, religious difference could be less evident than in a more monocultural context. In some respects, the peripheries of a culture can come to have more in common with each other than they do with their centres, or, as one anthropologist articulates it: 'the maximum of difference is to be sought near the center of gravity of each country and not at the frontier where they meet.'<sup>48</sup> For Byzantium's eastern frontier, this could

<sup>47</sup> These debates continue to rage today as well: M. Wolf (ed.), *Do We Worship the Same God? Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012); J. Neusner (ed.), *Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims Worship the Same God?* (Nashville, 2012), inter alia.

<sup>48</sup> O. Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928–1958* (London, 1962), 470.

potentially mean that the akritic warriors would have more in common with their opponents than either of them would with Constantinople or Baghdad. Likewise in Umayyad Spain, at the major Christian–Muslim interface of medieval Europe, the frontier ‘was not a neat line of division between believers and unbelievers, but a complex abode of mixed loyalties and aristocratic rule, with which the central government had to deal in order to attract its leaders into the centre’s political sphere’.<sup>49</sup> However, the key thing Leo exploits here is the ideological difference, not the cultural similarity. Unlike the other enemies listed in this constitution, Leo does not treat the Arabs as one of the *ethnika* which, once in the sphere of Byzantine influence, would become an extension of Byzantium. There would never be the possibility of Arab assimilation after conquest, and there are no records of missionary efforts sent from Constantinople to the Muslims.<sup>50</sup> The deciding factor for Leo remained ideological and therefore political differences, not racial ones. By emphasizing their ‘non-Christianity’, he validates the idea of killing them in battle. This is exactly the opposite to his more squeamish posture in the section on the Bulgars, where he flatly says it is not appropriate to spill the blood of Christian brethren and counsels the use of the Pechenegs (here called ‘Turks’ by Leo) as proxies in order to bring the Bulgars into submission.<sup>51</sup>

### Leo’s Perspective on Islam: Is God the Author of Evil?

Second, he accuses the Muslims of making God the author of evil. Although the Old Testament texts support a very similar reading of the sovereignty of God,<sup>52</sup> Leo appears to disagree. In the prologue, he had already stated that war was a device of the devil.<sup>53</sup> In his opinion, therefore, when he claims in Constitution 18 that the Muslims believe that ‘God

<sup>49</sup> E. Manzano Moreno, ‘The Creation of a Medieval Frontier: Islam and Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula, Eighth to Eleventh Centuries’, in D. Power and N. Standen (eds.), *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700* (London, 1999), 50.

<sup>50</sup> Although scholars and clerics took part in embassies to Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries, their role was ‘to uphold the emperor’s intellectual credentials as champion of Christians: they were not really in the business of converting individuals to Christianity and there can have been no serious expectation of converting the caliph or other Muslim rulers’. J. Shepard, ‘Spreading the Word: Byzantine Missions’, in C. Mango (ed.), *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2002), 235.

<sup>51</sup> *Taktika* 18.40 (Dennis, 452–3).

<sup>52</sup> ‘I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things’ (Isa 45:7 among others). Some will be quick to point out that disaster is not necessarily the same thing as ‘evil’, theologically speaking.

<sup>53</sup> *Taktika*, Prologue (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 673C). Dennis, 4.

delights in wars', he was likening the activity of God with the activity of the devil, which constitutes blasphemy. This comment goes a bit further than simply declaring that Muslims are not Christians. A declaration of blasphemy intensifies the 'otherness factor' a further degree, from 'different' to 'different and wrong'. Now the Muslims, according to Leo, are not only worshipping a different God from the one worshipped by Christians, and, Leo implies, this God is not worthy of worship.

The Muslim God described by Leo 'delights in wars', making him not only diabolical, but the very opposite to the belief of the Byzantines, for whom war was itself evil and something to be avoided as grievous to God. This attitude has a long pedigree in Byzantium. It is not controversial to say that Christianity and military service were considered incompatible by the early church, because the principle of Christian non-resistance goes back as far as the first martyr Stephen.<sup>54</sup> However, with the legalization of Christianity by Constantine in the fourth century, the status of Christian soldiers changed, making it possible for a Christian to obey an order to kill without compromising his faith commitment.<sup>55</sup> Despite Augustine's articulation of just war theory – which medieval Byzantines simply did not read – the Eastern Fathers regarded the requirements of the military profession as troubling, and even Augustine himself advised Boniface, military governor of Numidia, thus: 'You must always have peace as your objective and regard war as forced upon you, so that God may free you from this necessity and preserve you in peace.'<sup>56</sup> Just war theory as it was applied in Byzantium has been periodically revisited by a number of scholars, but the animating thinker of the eastern view was Aristotle rather than Augustine.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Acts 7:54–60.

<sup>55</sup> The Edict of Milan in 313 legalized the Christian faith and one year later, at the Council of Arles in 314, the Church proposed to excommunicate Christians who refused military service. Cf. A. von Harnack, *Militia Christi. Die christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, 1905), 87. Furthermore, the injunctions in Rom 13 to obey civil authorities obligate Christian soldiers to obey military commands from army officers. For more on Basil the Great's canon 13 on penance for soldiers, see M. Riedel, 'Nikephoros II Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrdom', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41.2 (2015): 121–47.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 189.2.6. Reprinted in Michael Maas (ed.), *Readings in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000), 100. The discussion of holy war theory has been revisited in recent years, but is difficult to apply to Byzantine philosophies of war.

<sup>57</sup> See I. Stouraitis, 'Just War and Holy War in the Middle Ages, Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine Case-Study', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 2 (2012): 227–64; A. Laiou, 'On Just War in Byzantium', in J. S. Langdon and J. S. Allen (eds.), *To Ellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.* (New Rochelle, NY, 1993): 153–77; T. Lin, 'Just War in Byzantine Thought', *Michigan Academician* 13 (1981): 485–9; G. Michaelides-Nouaros, 'Ο δίκαιος πόλεμος κατά τὰ Τακτικά Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ' ['Just War in the Taktika of Leo the Wise'], *Symmikta Sefheriadou* (1961): 41–34.

Scholars have recently reanimated the debates about Byzantine holy war, if it can be called that, but these disputes generally run into the sand because of a disagreement about the definition of 'holy war'. The Byzantines were not interested in earning salvation through obedience to wars called by ecclesiastical authorities, as some have argued was the case for the European crusaders.<sup>58</sup> Nor was it true that Byzantine soldiers were motivated by a Christianized version of *jihad*, although others have considered the distinctively religious character of the tenth-century Byzantine reconquest to meet the criteria for something that might be considered holy war.<sup>59</sup> At best, one might conclude, as does Kolia-Dermitzaki, that 'we have to conclude that a definition of Holy War which would be accepted once and for all will never be achieved.'<sup>60</sup> The thing that scholars do agree on was the well-known disinclination of Byzantines to engage in warfare if it could be avoided through diplomacy or other means.<sup>61</sup> Even Leo VI makes clear his own disinclination to fight pitched battles, preferring instead to rely on 'deceit ... raids ... hunger ... [or] very frequent assaults ...'<sup>62</sup>

This Byzantine distaste for warfare has led Hans-Georg Beck to call Byzantium 'ein kriegsunwilliges Reich'.<sup>63</sup> In order to overcome the dissonance of practising a profession they were advised to regard as 'forced upon you', Byzantine armies from the fifth century onwards included regular religious observances, led by military chaplains, designed to maintain the purity of combatants' souls so that they were prepared to die.<sup>64</sup> Reverses were blamed on Byzantine sin rather than military failure, successes credited to the favour of God rather than Byzantine strategy.

<sup>58</sup> C. Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom: Holy War and the Crusades* (Oxford, 2004); C. Erdmann, *The Origin and the Idea of Crusade* (Princeton, 1977); J. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality* (London, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> G. Dagron, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique'; J.-Cl. Cheynet, 'La guerre sainte à Byzance au moyen Âge: un malentendu', in D. Baloup and P. Josserand (eds.), *Regards croisés sur la guerre sainte. Guerre, religion et idéologie dans l'espace méditerranéen latin (XIe–XIIIe siècle)*, *Colloque international de la Casa de Velásquez, Madrid 11–13 avril 2005* (Toulouse, 2006): 13–32.

<sup>60</sup> A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, '“Holy War” in Byzantium Twenty Years Later', in J. Koder and I. Stouraitis (eds.), *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion, Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)* (Vienna, 2012): 121–32, at 132.

<sup>61</sup> I. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz* (Vienna, 2009); A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο στις ομιλίες και τις επιστολές του 10<sup>ου</sup> και 11<sup>ου</sup> αι. Μία ιδεολογική προσέγγιση*, in *Byzantium at War (9th–12th century)* (Athens, 1997): 213–38.

<sup>62</sup> Dennis, *Taktika* 20.51, 555.

<sup>63</sup> H.-G. Beck, 'Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte', in H. Hunger (ed.), *Das Byzantinische Herrscherbild* (Darmstadt, 1975), 360.

<sup>64</sup> J.-R. Vieillefond, 'Les pratiques religieuses dans l'armée byzantine d'après les traités militaires', *Revue des études anciennes* 36 (1935), 322–30.

In announcing at the outset of his military manual that the science of warfare had been forgotten in Byzantium, and that this had contributed to recent losses against the Muslims, Leo VI was making an unusual if logical argument. Yet even he viewed theological considerations as fundamental to good military practice. Because Orthodox Christianity is concerned with imitating God, Byzantium had theological as well as military reasons to avoid pitched battles, and its military writers ascribe to the wisdom of avoiding conflict where possible.<sup>65</sup> At least a part of this was justified by God's holiness, which demanded separation from the defilement of evil.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Leo's portrayal, rightly or wrongly, of the Muslim God as a being who delights in wars must necessarily be anathema. Further, in describing this view of God as diabolical, Leo is also echoing well-known comments made earlier in the ninth century by Niketas Byzantios in his polemic against Islam.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the portrayal of the Muslim God as something closer to the devil than a deity was designed to reinforce the permissibility of killing a Muslim enemy, despite the traditional Christian distaste for war.

### Leo's Perspective on Islam: Is It Fatalism?

Third, Leo is convinced that the Muslim belief in the sovereignty of God was so strong as to verge on fatalism ('if they happen to suffer some reverse, they do not resist it'). With this comment, Leo's critique progresses from 'different and wrong' to 'different, wrong, and contemptible'. By contrast, Leo's counsel for the Byzantine generals is the opposite: they are not to be hasty in their victory celebrations, and in the event of a failure, they must not allow the soldiers to see that they are surprised or unhappy.<sup>68</sup> As inheritors of the Roman military system of discipline, Byzantine soldiers were not permitted to go down without a fight. Both Leo and Maurice acknowledge the danger of fatalism and discouragement, advising their generals to conceal negative reports and do everything to build up the morale of their soldiers, even if they have to invent reasons for hope.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> For an analysis of the canon of Basil on the penance of soldiers guilty of killing in warfare and its application to the putative request of Nikephoros II Phokas that soldiers killed in combat receive martyrial honours, see M. L. D. Riedel, 'Nikephoros II Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrs', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41.2 (2015): 121–47.

<sup>66</sup> Deut. 17; Ps. 5:4; 101:4.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Niketas Byzantios on Sura 7, 178, where he accuses the Muslim God of being the cause of evil. (*Refutation, Patrologia Graeca* 105.744BC).

<sup>68</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 26.

<sup>69</sup> *Strategikon* VIII.13–14, *Taktika* 14.

Crucially, it is the boldness of the general that is key; both manuals repeat a proverb attributed to Hannibal: ‘It is better to have an army of deer commanded by a lion than an army of lions commanded by a deer.’<sup>70</sup> Byzantine armies are intended to be at the top of the food chain, not prey but predators, the very opposite of fatalistic.

### Conclusion

In Constitution 18, Leo’s description of the Muslim faith is designed to draw a stark contrast with Christianity primarily by denigrating Islam, although he is not entirely negative; elsewhere he praises the speed of their horses and their archery skill, but these things would be known to any soldier who had seen action against them. Religious beliefs are more difficult to discern on a battlefield and therefore make an ideal subject on which to expound at length. But Christian soldiers were not only to be encouraged by declarations that the faith of their opponents was blasphemous and contemptible. In his portrayal of the Christian soldiers who opposed them, Leo sought to bolster confidence by reiterating the importance of their role as defenders of the faith as well as the faithful. As the [next chapter](#) will show, the Epilogue provides a deeper theological explanation for why they could depend on God to fight on the side of the Byzantines: their relationship to the deity as children, members of the flock, and a chosen people.<sup>71</sup> This was the essence of the Byzantine Christian view of warfare, according to Leo VI.

<sup>70</sup> *Strategikon* VIII.79, *Taktika* 20.128.

<sup>71</sup> For more on the ideology of chosenness as understood by the Byzantines, see [Chapter 7](#).

*The Ideal Christian General*

Leo VI, often portrayed in previous scholarship as a weak or inconsequential emperor, was in fact a ruler of great force. He resisted two conspiracies (in 894 and 897), an assassination attempt (in 903), and the defection of one of his best generals to the caliphate (in 906–7), not only surviving these attacks on his authority, but triumphantly achieving most of his objectives as emperor.<sup>1</sup> This man also considered himself qualified to instruct his generals and to design a vision for the Christian army under his authority. The key element to this plan, brilliantly, was the concept of the ideal Christian general. This concept is essential to understanding all of Leo's prescriptions with regard to Byzantine warfare, and particularly warfare against Muslims. The entire *Taktika* is addressed to this ideal general, revealing not only Leo's perspective on Byzantine hierarchy, but also his view of the value of Christian piety in life-or-death situations.

Averil Cameron has recently remarked that 'as long as religious language and theological rhetoric in Byzantine texts remain so understudied and undertheorized, they will continue to be accepted at face value, or conversely, ignored as irrelevant.'<sup>2</sup> The problem is that religious language has been either uncritically accepted or dismissed as irrelevant. However, more detailed study, and indeed, some attempt at theorizing the uses and abuses of this religious language in Leo's *Taktika* may help to lift our scholarly grasp of the theological context of Byzantium above the usual caricature of 'an exotic and unchanging other'.<sup>3</sup>

What follows here is an analysis of how the emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912) used scriptural language and biblical references to mould his vision of proper Christian political identity, narrowly focused in this text on the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Chronological Accuracy of the "Logothete" for the Years AD 867–913', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965) 89–112; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The Revolt of Andronicus Ducas', *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966) 23–5.

<sup>2</sup> A. Cameron, 'The Very Model of Orthodoxy?' in *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton, 2014), III.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, 'The Very Model', III.



person of the ideal general. In so doing, he was not following cultural norms, but rather setting them. Not only was Leo, as an educated middle Byzantine, comfortable using and referencing scriptural materials, he was also unafraid to do that most un-Byzantine of things: innovate. His use of scripture is interesting for its creativity, flexibility, and sometimes downright cheekiness. In particular, he often dischronologizes the scriptures he uses, adapting them for his contemporary use with a gleeful disregard for their original context.

### The Ideal General

In his commentary on the *Taktika*, John Haldon rightly observed that this manual ‘can be seen in many respects as a pamphlet on the Christian moral qualities of the general, and the moral conduct of warfare, as well as the proper management of an army’.<sup>4</sup> The key to the moral conduct of warfare and the proper management of an army is of course the character and quality of the primary decision-maker, the general. Therefore, the imperial prescription for the Christian moral character of the Byzantine general is of primary importance for our understanding of this text, as well as for the priorities of Leo VI.

The qualities of the ideal Byzantine general comprise a subject so important that it merits its own constitution, immediately following the Prologue and Constitution I (on definitions of ‘tactics’ and ‘strategy’). Constitution 2, entitled ‘On the necessary qualities of the general’ (Περὶ τοῦ οἴου εἶναι δεῖ τὸν στρατηγόν), mostly reprises material from Maurice’s *Strategikon* and Onasander’s *Strategikos*. In addition, Constitution 20 is written as instruction specifically intended for the general, who also features largely in the condensed review of Leo’s foundational theological principles in the Epilogue. The book as a whole is addressed to the general; Leo appears not so much interested in instructing the army, but only its leadership.

This sustained focus on the general is unique in Byzantine military treatises and is the key to understanding Leo’s central purpose. Apart from a short section on the duties of the general in the gnomology of Maurice’s *Strategikon*, most of which was copied from Onasander and reproduced nearly verbatim by Leo, no earlier Byzantine military manual discusses the person of the general in any detail, although several later ones devote some

<sup>4</sup> J. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2014), 33.

attention to the topic.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one could argue that Leo's emphasis was so thorough and convincing that later writers of military manuals – who were army generals themselves – reprised or expanded his material, implicitly assuming familiarity on the part of their intended readers. It is also worth noting that Leo's manual 'was copied more than any other Byzantine military work'.<sup>6</sup>

### Constitution 2 and Constitution 20

Leo did not write original material on the profession of generalship. He took what he found in two earlier Greek manuals and carefully edited, paraphrased, and assembled the principles and aphorisms into an ideal with consciously Christianized packaging. Book I of Onasander's *Strategikos* describes what to look for in choosing a general (Περὶ αἰρέσεως στρατηγοῦ);<sup>7</sup> this material is copied in Constitution 2.1–21.<sup>8</sup> The last part of Constitution 2 expands upon the ancient exhortation to engage only in just war.<sup>9</sup> This is where the *Taktika* combines Christian theology and justification for warfare with the requirement that a general demonstrate exemplary piety, something that had previously never been done in Byzantine military writings.

Book VIII of Maurice's *Strategikon* is entitled 'General instructions and maxims', of which the first part (44 sections) are 'general instructions for the commander' and the second part (101 sections) simply 'maxims'.<sup>10</sup> These both correspond to Leo's Constitution 20 (221 sections). Taken together, Constitutions 2 and 20, with their specific emphasis on the character and comportment of the general, serve as bookends to the tactical material in

<sup>5</sup> This includes the *Præcepta militaria*, *De velitatione*, the anonymous treatise *On Strategy*, the book on campaigning and organization, and the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos. The *Advice and Anecdotes* of Kekaumenos in the late eleventh century is a parainetic text that in parts most closely resembles Leo's perorations on the ideal general, but it is also addressed to a son and to an emperor.

<sup>6</sup> G. T. Dennis (tr.) *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1984), xix.

<sup>7</sup> *Strategikos*, 1.1–27. See W. A. Oldfather (tr.), *Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander* (London, 1923), 374–87.

<sup>8</sup> In the Ambrosianus B 119 sup (139), the material from Onasander is in 2.1–38. The *Taktika* begins on folio 189. Dennis has observed that, although the Ambrosianus is a slightly later paraphrase of the original text (in the Mediceo-Laurentianus graecus 55.4), it nevertheless 'cannot be ignored' (G. T. Dennis (tr.), *The Taktika of Leo VI. Text, Translation, and Commentary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC, 2014), xi). Similar material translated from the Laurentian manuscript can be found in Constitution 2.1–28 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 17–35).

<sup>9</sup> In the Ambrosianus, 2.39–53. See similar expressions in Onasander, IV.1; Thucydides II.74; Xenophon, *Cyropedia*, 1.5.13–14; Dionysius of Halicarnassus II.72.30.

<sup>10</sup> Περὶ καθολικῶν παραγγελμάτων τῷ στρατηγῷ ἀρμοζόντων. Γνωμικά.

Constitutions 3–19. Constitution 2 enumerates personal and moral qualities of the general, while Constitution 20 lists maxims that apply to his professional conduct.

The first section of Constitution 20 instructs the reader (ὦ στρατηγὲ) to pay attention to what follows, because this will help him to sharpen his grasp of military science. In this it differs from Constitution 2, which lists only the personal qualities of a leader, not advice on conduct or leadership. The material in Constitution 2 is borrowed mainly from Onasander, a first-century writer whom Dain damns with faint praise as ‘un aimable graeculus ... nullement versé dans l’art militaire’.<sup>11</sup> Onasander’s treatise, *The General* (Στρατηγικός), was well known, widely disseminated in the Late Roman world, and copied by Maurice in the sixth century, as well as Leo VI in the ninth century. It also enjoyed a robust afterlife in the West.<sup>12</sup> It was an obvious choice for Leo’s treatise, because as its English translator observed, it ‘lays uncommon stress upon the *imponderabilia*, especially ethical and religious considerations’.<sup>13</sup> The attributes considered desirable for a general in Leo’s Constitution 2 are somewhat curious, as much for what is included as for what seems to be missing. A very brief summary of these will illustrate the point.

Closely following Onasander in the first 38 sections, Leo lists characteristics of a disciplined lifestyle first: the general must be abstemious, self-restrained, sober, diligent, frugal, temperate in his needs, careful and assiduous in his affairs, circumspect, prudent, not avaricious, not ambitious except for glory.<sup>14</sup> One assumes that this refers not to personal glory but to the glory of the Byzantine army. Then comes a rather vague notion about the general’s age: not too young or too old.<sup>15</sup> It is advantageous if he is also a father, and he should be a good public speaker.<sup>16</sup> He should have a good reputation for virtue so that his soldiers will respect him.<sup>17</sup> A man’s personal wealth or lack thereof should not affect the decision of whether

<sup>11</sup> A. Dain and J.-A. Foucault, ‘Les stratèges byzantins’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 328. Similarly, H. Hunger describes him as ‘von praktischer militärischer Erfahrung unbeschwert’ (*Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), I: 325). Cf. A. Dain, *Les manuscrits d’Onesandros* (Paris, 1930), 137–44. Leo identifies Onasander by name in the *Taktika*, Constitution 14.112. Constitution 2.1–38 follows very closely the material in Onasander’s *Strategikos*, Chapter 1, albeit in paraphrase.

<sup>12</sup> It was translated into Latin, Spanish, German, and French by the fifteenth century, and into Italian and English by the sixteenth century. Oldfather, *Onasander*, 357–61.

<sup>13</sup> Oldfather, *Onasander*, 349.

<sup>14</sup> *Taktika*, 2.1–8 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 681C–684B). Dennis, 16–19.

<sup>15</sup> *Taktika*, 2.9–10 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 684B). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.9, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Taktika*, 2.11–15 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 684CD). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.11–12, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis, *Taktika* 2.13, p. 22.

to promote him to the generalship, because only character matters.<sup>18</sup> Most important, the ideal general should have illustrious ancestors, but this factor should not outweigh the man's character.<sup>19</sup> There are a few physical requirements: he must be healthy and strong, not given to pleasures.<sup>20</sup> He should be courteous, well-prepared, and steady.<sup>21</sup> He ought not to be too lenient, nor too harsh with his soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

In the final 15 sections of Constitution 2 (expanded from five sections in the Laurentian ms), Leo lists the specifically Christian qualities of the ideal Byzantine general. Section 39 begins with an exhortation that the general ought to cultivate love of God and righteousness before anything else, which, he goes on to specify, means: 'Fear him, and love him with your whole heart, and with your whole mind, and observe all his commandments.'<sup>23</sup> Although this phrase is not a precise biblical quote, it is redolent of a number of similar statements that are repeated throughout the Old Testament that enjoin fear of God (Deut 10:20), love of God (Deut 11:1), with one's heart and mind (Deut 30:6, 20) and keeping of his commandments (Deut 30:16; Eccl 12:13, which also exhorts fear of God). Moreover, it echoes Jesus's answer to the question of the Sadducees, who asked, 'What is the greatest commandment?' and were told, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (Matt 22:36–37) By conflating all of these, Leo invokes the law (Deuteronomy) of the Old Testament, its wisdom literature (Ecclesiastes), and the Christian gospel (Matthew). These serve to emphasize the personal and royal roles that Leo himself claimed especially: a lawgiver, a new Solomon, and a spiritual leader.

The final sections of Constitution 2 emphasize making justice and righteousness the foundation of all actions (2.41), taking care to render justice impartially and to engage only in just war (2.46–50).<sup>24</sup> The general also is encouraged to set a standard of excellence in all things, to pay close attention to the *Taktika*, and to please God (2.51–53).<sup>25</sup> Leo laments the

<sup>18</sup> Dennis, *Taktika* 2.14, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Taktika*, 2.16–25 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 685B). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.15–17, pp. 24–7.

<sup>20</sup> *Taktika*, 2.26–34 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 688C–689A). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.18, pp. 26–9.

<sup>21</sup> *Taktika*, 2.35 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 689A). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.19, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Taktika*, 2.36–37 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 689B). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.19, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Πρὸ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων, ὧ στρατηγέ, πρῶτην σοι ταύτην παρακέλευσίν τε καὶ παραίνεσιν ποιούμεθα, ὥστε θεοφιλίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης ἐπιμελείσθαι, καὶ οἷον ὄρῃν διηνεκῶς πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν τὸν Θεὸν καὶ φοβεῖσθαι αὐτὸν, καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου, καὶ μετ' ἐκεῖνον ἡμᾶς, καὶ τὰς αὐτοῦ ἐκτελεῖν ἐντολὰς. Dennis, *Taktika* 2.22, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis, *Taktika* 2.29, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Dennis, *Taktika* 2.33, p. 36.

brevity of the *Taktika* and recommends further reading, but this seems optimistic on his part as well as slightly ironic, given the enormous length of the *Taktika* by itself.<sup>26</sup> Later Byzantine generals seem to have received the length of Leo's book with something less than equanimity, so additional reading would have been even more onerous.<sup>27</sup> Yet he recommends to the general another tactical manual, compiled by Leo himself, that preserves the text of two older books, now lost, neither of which make any mention at all of religion, apart from the standard ritual prayer for success on the eve of battle.<sup>28</sup> It is significant that Leo recommends this book in addition to the *Taktika*, because it is entirely focused on strategy and tactics in a way that the *Taktika* only appears to be. Rather than incorporating the material from this book into the *Taktika*, he leaves it separate, choosing to include in the *Taktika* only what he has copied from Onasander and Maurice, but giving it his own spin.

Strangely missing from Constitution 2's list of qualifications is any discussion of prior military experience or proven expertise. As a job description, it is also lacking any discussion of required competencies beyond personal characteristics, or a list of responsibilities that a general might be expected to bear. What it does focus on very heavily is the character, morals, personal conduct, and Christian faith of the ideal general. In the section that Leo copies from Onasander, he scrupulously replaces Onasander's references to fate (τύχη) with references to God, thus explicitly Christianizing a text already deeply concerned with moral behaviour. Leo's use of Onasander and his adaptations to its text reveal Leo's focus on the role of the general, but with Leo's particular twist. He not only

<sup>26</sup> *Taktika*, 2.52–53 (*Patrologia Graeca* 107, 693CD). Dennis, *Taktika* 2.33, p. 36. Leo refers to another book he has written containing a summary of two tactical manuals, no longer extant, containing material not included in the *Taktika*. For the Greek text: A. Dain (ed.), *Sylloge tactorum, quae olim "Inedita Leonis tactica" dicebatur* (Paris, 1938). For a summary and analysis in German: R. Vári, 'Die sogenannte "Inedita Tactica Leonis"', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 27 (1927): 241–70. In a personal communication, Father George Dennis identified this book as Leo's reference, and he duly footnotes it in his edition (but Haldon disagrees, because he views the *Sylloge Tacticorum* as drawing on the *Taktika* and therefore chronologically posterior, therefore not a source (see Haldon, *Commentary*, 134). For a recent English translation of the *Sylloge Tacticorum*, see G. Chatzelis and J. Harris (trs.), *A Tenth-Century Byzantine Military Manual: The Sylloge Tacticorum* (Abingdon, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> '... because a long treatise usually brings forth unpleasant reactions ... we will pass over the subject.' *Campaign Organisation and Tactics* (Περὶ κατὰστάσεως ἀπλήκτου), 32.18–22, in G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, DC, 1985) 326–7. Because Leo's *Taktika* is the longest military manual in Byzantium (apart from Ouranos, who copies the whole *Taktika* and adds more), I am assuming that the generals' reaction to 'a long treatise' refers to it.

<sup>28</sup> This is also found in Onasander as a recommendation that the general make the appropriate sacrifices to the gods and await an auspicious sign before commencing battle. After the legalization of Christianity, Byzantine armies simply substituted Christian rituals for the pagan ones.

changes the first-century pagan references to fate, he broadens the ethical and moral component, attaching it to Christian piety as a prerequisite for military success.<sup>29</sup> This, as one might expect, is where the biblical references begin to appear.

### The Character of the Ideal Byzantine General

For example, scripture is central to the counsel in Constitution 2.10:

We know that a general who is loved by his subjects will be more highly regarded and be very helpful to the men under his command. When men love someone, they are quick to obey his commands, they do not distrust his words and promises and, when he is in danger, they will fight along with him. For love is like this: to lay down one's life on behalf of the person one loves. [cf. John 15:13]<sup>30</sup>

This is an interesting interpretation of John 15:13, which says: 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.'<sup>31</sup> The biblical context is the example of self-sacrifice modelled by Jesus, and the exhortation is for the disciples to love one another. Leo, however, changes this to a slightly more pragmatic, or utilitarian sense. In his presentation, the focus is not friendship, but being loved. For Leo, the verse demonstrates that if the general is *loved* by his soldiers, they will be more willing to die for him, i.e. at his command. The idea of obedience is explicit in John 15 ('You are my friends if you obey what I have commanded' v.14). However, the direct exhortation to be loved in order to win obedience unto death is missing in the biblical text. The scriptural context is Jesus speaking here of himself, albeit indirectly, because he would soon submit to death on a cross.

In Leo's hands, this biblical idea – dying for one's friends – becomes a tool to engender the obedience of soldiers. His interpretation misses the near universal concept in military science that soldiers obey because they have taken an oath of obedience. They are bound by obligation on account of their oath, not by love. Love does not usually come into it. By bringing in the idea of love, Leo is tinkering with the motivational mechanisms of military command theory and practice. This might possibly indicate a problem with army discipline, but it certainly reveals the emperor's view

<sup>29</sup> These themes are repeated briefly in the Epilogue and more fully in Constitution 20.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 20–1.

<sup>31</sup> ESV. UBS: μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ.

of the use of Christian scripture in the service of what can only be viewed as political goals.

Of course it is true that soldiers will follow a leader whom they hold in high regard with more enthusiasm than one whom they abhor, but what strikes an odd note here is Leo's bloodless application of scripture not for the sake of faith or love for God, but for the sake of a political ambition: the winning of battles. In effect, Leo encourages the general to become like Christ to his soldiers, to become someone for whom they are willing to die because they love him. But the scriptural context is very nearly the opposite: it is about the Christ announcing his willingness to die for his followers. Leo's exegesis inverts the biblical context for the purpose of his own political agenda.

In his recent commentary, Haldon writes, 'The biblical quotations – from both Old and New Testaments – are standard fare in any such list of appropriate or desirable attributes, and need no comment, although they are taken from the *Strategikon* [of Maurice].'<sup>32</sup> This comment is somewhat mysterious, as Haldon does not explain what he means by 'standard fare' nor are there any direct quotations in the *Strategikon* (although there are some brief echoes, as I have framed them). Although Leo does use Maurice's work, as well as those of Onasander and Polyanus, he is careful to edit and rearrange what he copies. The change that is most noticeable is the insertion of biblical material – both direct quotations and 'scriptural echoes' – to expand the ancient description of moral character for the Byzantine general. The effect of this change is to specifically and explicitly Christianize the earlier pagan material and to sharpen the biblical imperative implicit in Maurice's material.

For example in Constitution 2.22:

Before everything else, O general, we propose this to you as our very first subject of exhortation and advice: be concerned about the love of God and righteousness in such manner that you constantly have God before your eyes. Fear him. Love him with all your heart and all your soul and, after him, us. [cf. Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37] Keep his commandments and, in turn, you will receive his favor, so that – if I may speak rather boldly – in difficult situations you may with confidence and trust pray to our common Lord as a friend to a friend and you may request the salvation you hope for from him as from a friend. That one is not a liar who said: The Lord will do the will of those who fear him and he will hear their prayer and save them. [Ps 144(145):19]<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 131.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 31.

Theologically, Leo's use of Psalm 145:19 (LXX) is extraordinarily simplistic. It assumes a naive correlation between obedience (expressed through prayer) and divine protection. Apart from obvious questions of theodicy, this correlation does not hold for all Christians at all times, an observation that has been made by centuries of believers. There is no guarantee that God will save believers from death, simply because they pray. The stories of multitudes of martyrs bear witness to the opposite. Leo seems to be aware of this difficulty, because he glosses the problem in Constitution 2.23, emphasizing the omnipotence of God, and the folly of attempting anything not willed by God:

For you must realize that, apart from God's favour, it is not possible to bring any plan to a successful conclusion, however intelligent you may seem to be: it is not possible to overcome the enemy, however weak they may be thought. Everything lies in the providence of God, that providence that takes care of even those things that appear to be the least. [Echoes of Matt 6:25–28; Luke 12:22–26]<sup>34</sup>

Matthew 6:25–28<sup>35</sup> and the parallel passage in Luke 12 (which specifies 'ravens' as 'birds of the air') focus on the providence of God and God's attention on even the smallest details. For reasons that he leaves unspecified, Haldon notes in his commentary that the biblical parallels cited by Dennis here are 'spurious', but does not say why.<sup>36</sup> In the absence of more detail, I must disagree with Haldon's assessment here. The biblical material here is not explicitly quoted, but as both Dennis and I have noted, the echoes are there, in the idea of God's providence for αὐτὰ τὰ ἐλάχιστα δοκοῦντα, even those things that appear to be very small. Leo's point is here in accord with the thrust of the scriptural echoes he evokes: the Christian God is interested in details.

Leo's exhortation is a common pastoral one – God's people are more valuable than mere birds, yet birds do not worry about food or shelter, because they trust God to take care of them. Leo exhorts his general to have a similar simple trust. By using this language of God's caretaking providence for 'even the least', Leo invokes an echo of these verses, thereby

<sup>34</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> 'Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' (ESV)

<sup>36</sup> Haldon, *Commentary*, 133.



communicating on what some might call a ‘dog whistle’ level. One might ask, would the target audience of Leo’s text have had the ears to hear at this level? One can only assume yes, else why use it? The lectionaries of the Byzantine Church are built around the reading of all four Gospels over the course of each year, so it is not far-fetched to propose that this language would be familiar on a basic level to any Christian citizen of the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

But is this interpretation open to accusations of fatalism? Is Leo hedging his bets, as it were, by claiming that God’s providence is so strong that the general’s success will be proportional to his faith? Is this a protean version of the so-called prosperity gospel that has been so successful in the United States for some decades now? Leo continues in the next section, Constitution 2.24:

The providence of God (ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρόνοια) will teach him those things that are beneficial and will bring them to a successful conclusion. He should be the kind of man who is orthodox (εὐσεβής) in his faith and just (δίκαιος) in his deeds. As on a firm and unshakable foundation (ὡσπερ θεμελίῳ ἀγαθῷ καὶ ἀσαλευτῷ ἐποικοδομεῖ) he will build the other good qualities (τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ). [Cf. Matt 7:24]<sup>37</sup>

The theme of a do-it-yourself faith continues here in Section 24 – the general should be a pious, righteous man, building other good [qualities] on a firm and unshakeable foundation. That foundation is (according to the passage quoted from the Sermon on the Mount) the rock of obedience to the words of Jesus, whose words are only a bit more important than the emperor’s words, as we have already seen. The tension is somewhat resolved in the advice offered in Constitution 20.77, where Leo counsels his generals to pray with faith, but simultaneously to keep a grip on their weapons:

In time of war it is necessary to offer prayers to God and to invoke him as an ally. Nevertheless, do not completely neglect the struggles before you and do not think lightly of the tasks incumbent on you. With God, you must move your hands and offer them as instruments in his service. The archer will never hit the target if he does not shoot the arrow nor will that man ever overcome the enemy who does not stay in position, but runs away. To sum it up, a person who does not begin a task will not be successful at it. It is certainly necessary to pray to God to obtain victory in battle, but, at the same time, hold on to your weapons and, while you fight, invoke the Divinity as an ally.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν; Dennis, *Taktika*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 563.

In Leo's articulation in Constitution 2.30, however, one prays, one fights, but one always seeks peace above other options:

We must always, if it is possible on our part, be at peace with all men,<sup>39</sup> especially with those nations who desire to live in peace and who do nothing unjust to our subjects. [δεῖ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἀεὶ τοὺς, εἰ δυνατὸν τὸ ἐξ ἡμῶν, μετὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰρηνεύοντας, τοῖς εἰρηνεύειν βουλομένοις ἔθνεσι καὶ μηδὲν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς ὑποχειρίους ἡμῶν] We must always prefer peace above all else and we should be at peace with those nations and refrain from war.<sup>40</sup>

This light reference to Romans 12:18 harmonizes with the biblical context almost perfectly. Chapter 12 of Romans is about right thinking and right living, and comes just before a section exhorting the Romans to obey civil authorities, which are set up by God. It comes after a section explaining the mercy of God, and calls the Roman church to right conduct as a result of having received God's mercies.

The key thing here is the use of the epistle to the *Romans* to encourage the pursuit of peace, which, while a very Byzantine goal in terms of their cultural reluctance to engage in open battle, is also here emphasized as an explicitly Christian goal. Although I have no proof of it, I also rather suspect that this exhortation was chosen in part by Leo *because* it is written to the Romans. There are other scriptural references to seeking peace of course,<sup>41</sup> but this one may have had a deeper resonance in Byzantine culture, because throughout their history, they regarded themselves as 'Romans' and not the anachronistic term 'Byzantines' used by modern scholarship. The Pauline letter to the Romans resonates because it is both doctrinal and pastoral, but generally positive towards 'the Romans', who were, to the Byzantine way of thinking, the progenitors of the true Roman church in Constantinople. This is, moreover, a feature of middle Byzantine exegesis: to ignore the original biblical horizon in favour of a more suitable contemporary interpretation.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Rom 12:18 – 'If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.' Cf. Heb 12:14 – 'Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.'

<sup>40</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 35. Constitution begins: We must always embrace peace for our own subjects, as well as for the barbarians, because of Christ, the emperor and God of all. If the nations also share these sentiments and stay within their own boundaries and promise that they will not take unjust action against us, then you too refrain from taking up arms against them. Do not stain the ground with the blood of your own people or that of the barbarians. For while you are making accusations against the enemy, saying that they who have not been injured by you should not begin to take up arms unjustly, they may bring the same charges against you, claiming that they have not engaged in any hostile act against the subject of Our Majesty but have been living in peace with them.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Thess 5:3, 13; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11.

<sup>42</sup> M. Riedel, 'Biblical Echoes in Two Byzantine Military Speeches', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40.2 (2016): 207–22.

## **The Morale of Soldiers When Wounded or Killed**

For example, in Constitution 14.31, we find:

After the battle, O general, you are obliged to see to the comfort of the soldiers wounded in the action, as well as to provide proper burial for those who have fallen. Constantly pronounce them blessed because they have not preferred their own lives over their faith and their brothers. This is a religious act and it greatly helps the morale of the living.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, the exhortation is repeated in Constitution 16.11:

Show particular concern for the burial of the dead. Whether you are victorious or defeated, do not put forth the time, the hour, the place, or fear as an excuse. Reverence for those who have died is always good and holy. [2 Macc 12:43–45] It is especially necessary in the case of those who have fallen in battle, for it is with them that piety must manifest itself.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, it is not just the burial that is important, but the spiritual significance of burial that is emphasized in Constitution 20.72:

The bodies of the soldiers who have been killed in battle are sacred, especially those who have been most valiant in the fight on behalf of Christians. By all means, it is necessary to honor them reverently and to dignify them with burial and eternal memory. You must, moreover, O general, by your foresight, your concern, and your support, provide assistance to their children, their wives and their whole household. The soldiers will thus be in good spirits and eager to face the dangers of war, as they look upon the treatment of the dead as something that will happen to themselves after their end, if they are courageous and valiant in the struggle.<sup>45</sup>

It is noteworthy that the treatment of soldiers' bodies after death is dealt with directly in these sections, because Leo's approach goes part of the way towards the idea of granting martyrdom to battlefield casualties: their bodies are 'sacred', they 'fight on behalf of Christians', and they are to be dignified with 'eternal memory'. This injunction is original to Leo in the genre of military writings, was adapted by his son Constantine VII

<sup>43</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 307.

<sup>44</sup> Leo's remark continues: It also provides great consolation for the living. One seeing what transpires, each soldier will think that he will receive the same treatment. If he should observe that the fallen lie unburied or scattered about, he will reflect on his own situation; he will be angry at such an insult and will avoid suffering anything of the sort, that is, fighting and then being left unburied. But if he is deemed worthy of honours and, likewise, after he has fallen, of grateful remembrance, then, considering these things, he will not refrain from engaging in the struggle more enthusiastically. Dennis, *Taktika*, 387.

<sup>45</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 561.

in a military oration, and was taken to heart by Nikephoros II Phokas in the later tenth century, a general who sought to embody Leo's ideal commander described in the pages of the *Taktika*.<sup>46</sup>

There are the scriptural echoes here. They are faint but unmistakable in the approach to battlefield casualties as examples of Christian sacrifice. The texts that describe this are too many to mention here, but perhaps the most exemplary one that comes to mind is the Pauline observation that 'If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.' (1 Cor 15:9) In emphasizing the importance of appropriate treatment of the dead, Leo is echoing the eschatological imperative at the heart of Christian theology: if there is no resurrection, then there is no point in being Christian. So, connecting the dots then: if the Byzantine army and its general are true Christians, it is not just appropriate, but imperative that those who die for the general whom they love, and for the emperor who represents God, should receive not just military but also religious honours.

### **On the Wisdom Offered by Leo VI to His Generals**

Leo also advises his generals on their lifestyle and temperament in Constitution 2.25:

You should be gentle and untroubled to those you encounter, for a savage temperament is hateful and to be avoided. You should be plain and simple in matters of food and clothing. Extravagance and ostentation in food and raiment squander the funds for necessary items to no purpose. The general should be tireless and painstaking in attending to necessary matters, not slack or careless; care and persistence will easily carry him through the most difficult situations. If he shows no concern for a problem, that problem will show no concern for him. [Prov 13:13]<sup>47</sup>

Leo's rationale for writing is revealed in Constitution 20.1:

We lay these before you as a way of summarizing what is written in this book. These will enable you to move on to greater applications of tactical theory. According to the wise king, compiler of proverbs: a starting point given to a wise man results in his becoming more wise. [Prov 1:5]<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Riedel, 'Biblical Echoes'; M. L. D. Riedel, 'Nikephoros II Phokas and Military Martyrs', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41.2 (2015), 121–47.

<sup>47</sup> 'He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded'. Dennis, *Taktika*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> 'A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel'. Dennis, *Taktika*, 537.

When Leo quotes Solomon (the writer of Proverbs was conventionally believed to be Solomon), he is inhabiting his persona as the wise man, an epithet he earned in his own lifetime. It is interesting that reading a book of tactics (for that is putatively the contents of the manual) is presented by Leo as a way of attaining to wisdom. Part of my argument here is that this approach is part of Leo's unique articulation of what it means for Byzantium to be a Christian polity. A central aspect is the image of the ideal Christian general, and specifically his place in the Byzantine Christian hierarchical order.

Constitution 20 begins with a reference to the 'foregoing commands and constitutions' (τὰς εἰρημένους παραγγελίας τε καὶ διατάξεις) in such a way that the reader is led to understand that this constitution will be the conclusion. It is followed by an exhortation to the general to heed the following maxims of ancient authors Leo has collected, because they are brief and authoritative. In this way, says Leo, the general will hone his command of military science. In his Solomonic persona Leo then piously adds a biblical justification by quoting from the book of Proverbs: 'he who has wisdom profits from the opportunity to learn more'.<sup>49</sup>

From Sections 2–135, Constitution 20 then reprises Book VIII of Maurice's *Strategikon*, much of which is itself taken from Onasander.<sup>50</sup> Sections 136–221 repeat previous material elsewhere in the *Taktika*, including Constitution 2, mixed with other material from ancient authors including Onasander. Constitution 20 is, as previously noted, a gnomology and therefore difficult to describe briefly, but a general overview of its content is needed in order to understand how it fits with the *Taktika* as a whole. As the vocative (ὦ στρατηγέ) in 20.1 and elsewhere throughout the book shows, the key element to Leo's vision is the piety and character of the general.

The maxims in Constitution 20 fall into three main categories: personal qualities of the general (the smallest percentage), the conduct of the general towards his own soldiers (a large percentage), and general stratagems to employ against the enemy (the largest percentage). An example of the first category would be Section 5, which echoes Constitution 2.1 in exhorting sobriety on the part of the general. An example of the second category would be Section 148, which recommends that the general insist on self-control in himself and his soldiers, especially with regard to captive women. Leo here makes a reference to the Old Testament story of Phineas

<sup>49</sup> Prov 1:5; 20:5.

<sup>50</sup> *Strategikon*, Books II–XLII.

who was praised for his example of holiness by running his spear through a soldier and the captive Midianite woman with whom he was having sexual relations *in flagrante delicto*.<sup>51</sup> An example of the third category would be the suggestion in Section 81 that the general equip every place under his command with bows and arrows.

In keeping with Leo's emphasis on Christianized warfare, in a number of places he invokes religion as a factor with which the commander must reckon. In Section 39, he sternly commands: 'By no means and on no pretext whatever should you ever break a sworn agreement with the enemy. The crime of breaking an oath is a great evil. Inasmuch as God has been invoked, it is essential that what has been agreed on should remain firm. Whereas other nations observe their own faith, it would be shameful for the Romans, especially for Christians, to be accused of being unfaithful to what they have agreed to, with God as their witness.'<sup>52</sup> The ninth commandment appears to be held conditionally by Leo, however, as he claims that it is permissible to deceive his own soldiers in order to bolster morale,<sup>53</sup> but it is not permissible to lie to the enemy under oath, although acceptable in general as a battle stratagem.<sup>54</sup>

Leo enjoins his general to offer genuine worship to God (20.47), to revere the churches and those in them (20.70), and to purify the soldiers from sin before they join battle by having them sanctified by the blessing of the priests (20.172). At the same time, he is practical, declaring that 'in time of war it is necessary to offer prayers to God and to invoke him as an ally ... but at the same time, hold on to your weapons and, *while you fight*, invoke the Divinity as an ally.'<sup>55</sup> These themes are revisited in the Epilogue, but do not appear in Constitution 2, possibly because they concern conduct in warfare more than character in warfare.

The ideal commander described in Constitution 20 is metaphorically compared to the head of the body (20.193),<sup>56</sup> a shepherd (20.200), and a physician (20.213). All three of these metaphors are biblical ones used

<sup>51</sup> Num 25:5–8.

<sup>52</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 551.

<sup>53</sup> *Taktika*, 20.16: 'While reverses are quite likely to occur, an intelligent man employs the stratagem of keeping reports of them secret from the multitude of the army and causes reports stating the opposite of the truth to be circulated. Thus, he is able to raise the low morale of the soldiers.' (Dennis, 543)

<sup>54</sup> *Taktika*, 20.51: 'It is well to harm the enemy by deceit ...' (Dennis, 555). Cf. *Taktika* 20.53, 124.

<sup>55</sup> *Taktika*, 20.77.

<sup>56</sup> By contrast, the enemy general is characterized as the head of a viper (20.159), also a biblical image representing the adversary to the divine (Gen 3:1–15).

to describe the relationship of God towards his people.<sup>57</sup> In choosing to employ them, Leo is highlighting the general's position in the chain of command of a Christian army where God is clearly at the top, represented by the emperor on earth, whose authority is then delegated to the general, including responsibility not only for meting out justice to the army, but also for civil administration of the region where he has been made the *strategos*. This hierarchy of authority is a primary feature of Christian theology, and Leo VI, a man with a religious education, uses the same imagery with a naturalness that would have resonated with Byzantine Christians, even though its origin is not spelled out in the *Taktika*.

From this brief survey of Constitutions 2 and 20, one can see that 2 describes the character and primary motivation of the ideal general, including the critical importance of putting God first in all things. Constitution 20 repeats some material from Constitution 2, but then takes the trajectory a bit further, using biblical allusions, quotations, and imagery to communicate a vision of not just who the general is, but how he is to behave in the context of a Christian army. That is, he is to gain God as his ally, honour the dead as sacred, and fulfil his own role as the recipient and promulgator of both divine and imperial authority.

### Constitution 20 and the Epilogue

Both Constitution 20 and the Epilogue constitute gnomologies, or aphoristic collections, offering brief nuggets of advice for the general. Like Constitution 20, the Epilogue begins with an exhortation to the general to apply himself to everything in the manual, 'which has been said by us in the foregoing ... [and] commanded to you' (τὰ προειρημένα ἡμῖν ἅπαντα ... τῇ σῆ ἐνδοξότητι), for the sake of the peace and security of his subordinates.<sup>58</sup> In order to bolster Christian faith, and therefore Byzantine military success, Leo offers in the Epilogue (ὑπόθεσις ἐπιλόγῳ) a summary account of the points he considers most important in this endeavour.

The Epilogue begins, as does Constitution 2, with recommendations for the general, but unlike Constitution 2, which impersonally lists the necessary qualities, the Epilogue addresses the general directly. The general is exhorted, as in 2.53 and 20.1, to observe the recommendations that are

<sup>57</sup> Eph 5:23 (Christ is the head of the church, which is his body); John 10:1–16 (Jesus is the shepherd who knows his sheep, i.e. followers); Matt 4:23 (among many other verses, describes a core aspect of the ministry of Jesus Christ as healing).

<sup>58</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 1.

found in everything previously, that is, the entire *Taktika*. Typically, Leo also gives a justification for this, saying that in so doing, the general will keep himself and his soldiers free from danger and grief.<sup>59</sup> This is followed by what looks like it might become another list, because it starts with ‘first’.<sup>60</sup>

The first thing, the foundational step upon which Leo advises to the general to build everything is prayer. Do not, he says, begin anything without remembering and petitioning God, whether word or deed. This initial exhortation repeats in a condensed form what Leo advises in Constitution 2.39.<sup>61</sup> In the Epilogue, the justification for the exhortation continues at some length; the first eight sections are devoted to the character of God and the relationship that the general and that indeed all Christians have with the deity. Curiously, it is here in the Epilogue that Leo takes up the theme of beginnings. He asserts that the beginning of all things is found in God, to whom nothing is invisible.<sup>62</sup> Thus we read in Epilogue 3:

I judge it to be necessary for all things to take their beginning from God. He is our father and creator and watches over our words and our deeds. He is the judge of the desires and thoughts of our hearts and no creature is unseen in his presence. Everything is open and laid bare before his eyes, according to the great theologian Paul. [1 Cor 14:25] Wherefore, we ought to do nothing apart from his will. [Heb 4:12–13]<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, he continues, we are as children who receive life from him and in him we live and move and have our being.<sup>64</sup> Leo continues in Epilogue 4:

For there is a certain sort of relationship and bond between us and him [= God] such as that of children to their father. Indeed, it is from him that

<sup>59</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 1. Ὡς ἐν συνόψει δὲ τὰ προειρημένα ἡμῖν ἅπαντα οἷον ἀνακεφαλαιωσάμενοι ἐνταῦθα παρακελευόμεθα καὶ ὑποτιθέμεθα τῇ σῆ ἐνδοξότῃ. Ἐξ ὧν, ὡς εἴρηται, καὶ αὐτὸς στρατηγὸς ἀναδειχθεὶς ἀγαθὸς, καὶ βίον ἀκινδυνότατον τε καὶ ἀλυπώτατον τοῖς ὑπὸ σὲ ἀρχομένοις.

<sup>60</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 2. καὶ πρώτων . . .

<sup>61</sup> Πρὸ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων, ὡ στρατηγέ, πρώτην σοι ταύτην παρακέλευσιν τε καὶ παραίνεσιν ποιοῦμεθα, ὥστε θεοφιλίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης ἐπιμελείσθαι, καὶ οἷον ὄρᾳ διηλεκῶς πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν τὸν Θεὸν καὶ φοβέσθαι αὐτόν, καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου, καὶ μετ’ ἐκεῖνον ἡμᾶς, καὶ τὰς αὐτοῦ ἐκτελεῖν ἐντολᾶς, καὶ τὴν ἐκείνου εὐμένειαν ἐκ τούτου προσλαμβάνεσθαι, ἵνα εἰ καὶ τολμηρότερον εἰπῶν καιρῶ περιστάσεως ὡς φίλος φίλω, τῷ κοινῷ Δεσπότηθι θαρρόων πεποιθότως προσεύχη, καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τὰς ἐλπίδας ἔχων ταύτην αὐτοῦ φιλίως ἐξαιτῆς. Ἀψευδὴς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ εἰπὼν Ἐθέλημα τῶν φοβουμένων αὐτόν ποιήσει, καὶ τῆς δεήσεως αὐτῶν εἰσακούσεται, καὶ σώσει αὐτούς.

<sup>62</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 3. Cf. Heb 4:12–13.

<sup>63</sup> Dennis, *Taktika*, 621.

<sup>64</sup> Acts 17:28.



we have come into light and life [John 1] and we ought to live and die for him [Rom 14:8]. We are nourished by his gifts and in him we live and move and have our being. [Acts 17:28] We should obey him to the extent that a private soldier obeys his commanding officer [2 Tim 2:4], as slaves a good master [Rom 6:22; Eph 6:5], and as officials the emperor [Rom 13]. We are all his since he possesses power over all things [John 17:1; Eph 1:21]. It is from him that all animate and inanimate beings are in service to us. But we give our service to him. While the entire irrational flock is pastured and led by us, we are pastured by God, the good shepherd, who for our sake out of love for mankind put on our nature. [John 10:11]<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, this situation requires obedience, as a soldier to his commander, as a slave to a master, and an official to the emperor.

The exposition of this hierarchical order continues with the well-known biblical metaphor of God as a shepherd to his people, providing sustenance and protection. Leo has already likened the general to a good shepherd.<sup>66</sup> In the Epilogue, he describes the ideal shepherd who not only sets the example for the good general, but who is himself the shepherd upon whom the general and the entire army may depend.<sup>67</sup> God has made the earth and the sea and everything in them, and through them provides everything we need; he has also set up every authority on earth, including the authority given to an emperor or a general.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, he urges, 'it is necessary for you, o general, to do all things, above everything else, for the service of God.'<sup>69</sup> To put these things into concrete terms, Leo exhorts the general to protect and honour monasteries and churches and everyone who serves in them.<sup>70</sup> This is a requirement of the ideal general already mentioned in Constitution 20, but here in the Epilogue it receives a rather more extended theological justification.<sup>71</sup>

From there he moves to the subject of just war, mostly copied from Maurice (who adapted Onasander).<sup>72</sup> This is then followed by exhortations to prepare for war, depend on divine assistance, and pay strict attention to anything that will help morale.<sup>73</sup> Then he briefly repeats some of the requirements of the general, much of which is reworked from the material

<sup>65</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 4. Dennis, 621.

<sup>66</sup> *Taktika*, 20.200.

<sup>67</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 5. Cf. Ps 14:1.

<sup>68</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 6–7. Cf. Gen 1:1–2:25; Prov 8:15.

<sup>69</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 8. Διὰ τοῦτο δεῖ σε πάντα τὰ εἰς Θεοῦ θεραπείαν, ὡ στρατηγὲς, πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἐπιτηδεύειν καὶ διαφυλάττειν . . .

<sup>70</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 8–13.

<sup>71</sup> *Taktika*, 20.70.

<sup>72</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 14–17. See earlier discussion of just war theory on pp. 00–00.

<sup>73</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 18–37.

in Constitution 2.<sup>74</sup> Sharpening the focus, he gives a summary review of tactics and especially the general's role in choosing which ones to use and how to deploy his troops.<sup>75</sup> But the emperor is determined to show that the fruits of his research have not been narrowly limited to mere strategy and tactics. He presents a list of other useful sciences beyond tactics and then elaborates on each one in turn. These include the arts of soldiering (ὀπλιτική), mathematics (λογιστική), architecture (ἀρχιτεκτονική), astronomy (ἀστρονομική), theology (ιερατική), and medicine (ιατρική).<sup>76</sup> Finally there are a few ending exhortations and a benediction.<sup>77</sup>

The Epilogue is if not the official conclusion, a summary of the entire book. It is worth noting that although significantly shorter than Constitution 20, the Epilogue takes care to include the general's responsibility to assure his soldiers of posthumous glory and honourable burial.<sup>78</sup> Because the Christian religion emphasizes the afterlife, as does Islam, it should not be surprising that the treatment of fatal casualties on the battlefield merits a special mention in Leo's military manual. The Epilogue represents the 'crib notes' for this vast work, identifying its foundational principles, key thoughts, and recommended trajectory. Constitution 20 focuses on leadership, while the Epilogue focuses on what is unique to Byzantine leadership. The chain of command, as envisioned by Leo, is God, then the emperor, and under him the general, who is over the army.

### Epilogue and Constitution 2

Where Constitution 2 focuses on the person of the general himself, and his individual qualities including the requirement of exemplary Christian piety, the Epilogue lays the theological foundation for Byzantine warfare, including the role of the Byzantine general. There is something of a disjunction between these two chapters, with the Epilogue playing the greater role in Leo's thinking. Where Constitution 2 focuses on the person of the general, the 'who' of the ideal commander, the Epilogue reveals the theological roots, or the 'why', of this ideal. In between, Constitution 20 focuses on the 'how'.

The general should be a good public speaker, according to Constitution 2.13. The Epilogue emphasizes that before any speech or decision, the

<sup>74</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 38–41.

<sup>75</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 42–52.

<sup>76</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 53–69.

<sup>77</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 70–3.

<sup>78</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 41.

general is to ‘converse with God’, because just as God shepherds him, it is his duty to shepherd those under his authority.<sup>79</sup> In this way, Leo changes the classical emphasis on rhetorical skill to a divinely ordained role in which the general is to imitate God in his supervision of and communication with those under his care. More explicitly, where Constitution 2 exhorts the general to dutiful observation of the Christian faith, the Epilogue, expanding an earlier mention of this in Constitution 20.70, calls him to even more than this: the protection and reverence of Christian institutions like monasteries and churches, and especially those who live in them. The justification for this is also given. Because the priests are like the soul of the body of Christian believers, and therefore give it life, they are to be honoured as those who, representing the lifegiving God, govern the body.<sup>80</sup>

Where Constitution 2 calls the general to put God first, the Epilogue broadens the scope by putting the general more explicitly in his appropriate hierarchical context, by referring to God as ‘your general and leader’.<sup>81</sup> Constitution 2 first introduces in the *Taktika* the importance of putting God first, while the Epilogue ends with this very emphasis, stating: ‘And so it is always necessary for you, o general, in a fitting, dutiful way, to devote yourself to prayer to God and to observe his commandments ... By so doing you will receive salvation and victory from above in Christ the true God and eternal emperor of all, to whom be the glory and the power for the ages. Amen.’<sup>82</sup> And so the Epilogue puts the seal on Leo’s manual with a prayer.

Leo’s book is not focused exclusively on military science, despite his announcements in the Prologue. As a scholar, he works very hard at including everything military he can find, and indeed paraphrases, expands, and edits existing material with the help of his generals, his father’s war stories, and the battle dispatches sent from the front lines. In particular, he borrows heavily from Maurice’s *Strategikon* and Onasander’s *Strategikos*. He rearranges the material in these books to serve his primary purpose of revitalizing Byzantine military science through the concept of the ideal general, who in turn represents a specifically Christian concept of hierarchy.

Leo’s book is massive and provides material to be interpreted on several levels. On its face, the *Taktika* is concerned mainly to describe (or

<sup>79</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 2, 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 12.

<sup>81</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 16.

<sup>82</sup> *Taktika*, Epilogue 73. Dennis, 643.

repeat) the received wisdom on military strategy and tactics. This is the level at which the book has been examined by most previous scholarship. However, the explicit catalyst for the composition of the manual was the Saracen military threat. Dagon recognized this and wrote a watershed article on Leo's proposed mimesis of Arab practical theology.<sup>83</sup>

At a deeper level, Leo is concerned to contrast Byzantine Christian practice with that of the Muslim Arabs, primarily for the purpose of bolstering morale so that the soldiers would go forward more confidently into battle. Leo undertook to write his manual with the belief that he uniquely was able to combine the requirements of faith, thorough research into military strategy and tactics, and pious leadership in order to produce a tome that would serve a most practical purpose: the reanimation of Byzantine military know-how in the face of Saracen attacks from land and sea.

Leo's proposed solution goes beyond a mere shift in recruitment policy or advanced cavalry tactics. The larger context for his approach is a rethinking of the key to military success, which to his mind, rests on the general.<sup>84</sup> At the very heart of this subtle argument, he is seeking to craft a Byzantine cultural identity that finds its greatest prosperity in renewed and characteristic Christian piety. His theological approach is not one of mere lip service. He claims that all military endeavour should begin and end with prayer, just as his book does. He demands that the general set an example of piety and every Christian virtue, and that the soldiers are also held to a Christian standard of holiness, because they hold the high office of 'defenders of the faith'.

<sup>83</sup> G. Dagon, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle: À propos des constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI', *Comptes rendus de l'academie des inscriptions de belles lettres* (1983), 219–43.

<sup>84</sup> Haldon also sees competent military leadership as one of the main challenges facing Leo. *Commentary*, 373.

*A New Solomon*

The Byzantine idea of law, inherited from the ancient Romans, was closely tied to the concept of order (τάξις).<sup>1</sup> Byzantine culture consciously celebrated the demands of *taxis*, and this desire for ‘good order’ (εὐτάξις) reflected a Christian worldview of the universe as created by an orderly deity. The features of this organization often took the form of summarizing.<sup>2</sup> For example, the *Ecloga*, promulgated by the Isaurian emperors Leo III (r. 717–41) and his son Constantine V (r. 741–75), was intended to select the most relevant parts of the Theodosian Code – produced under Theodosios II (r. 408–50) – and the four books of the sixth-century Justinianic corpus. Thus the *Ecloga* has been called the ‘third great work of Byzantine legislation’ and the first one focused primarily on pastoral responsibilities of leadership, ‘derived systematically from a Christian foundation’.<sup>3</sup> As this chapter will show, Leo was eager to retain the pastoral approach of the *Ecloga* while distancing himself from the Isaurian emperors whose iconoclasm was deemed heresy after 843. In particular, he was interested in making a distinctively Orthodox faith publicly visible, for two reasons.

First, in the context of the later ninth century and the adjustment of the empire to a cultural context where iconophile theology had won a decisive battle, Leo wanted to demonstrate unimpeachable orthodoxy in the citizenry, to develop unity and harmony in a religious context that had been shredded for more than a century over the iconoclast controversy. Second,

<sup>1</sup> H. Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975) remains a classic statement, though characterized as ‘academic journalism’ by P. Magdalino in ‘Forty Years On: The Political Ideology of the Byzantine Empire’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40.1 (2016): 17–26. See also A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> See Z. Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture and the Roman Legal Tradition, 867–1056* (Cambridge, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> D. Simon, ‘Legislation as Both a World Order and a Legal Order’, in E. Laiou and D. Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 12 and 15–16.

it was in Leo's interest as emperor to make more distinct the differences between the belligerent Muslim neighbour and the peace-loving, divinely chosen Orthodox Christian people of his empire. His legislation was therefore produced in service of these two objectives. A subsidiary goal may have been to shore up his legitimacy as emperor by exercising the power of moral authority.<sup>4</sup>

The *Eisagoge*, promulgated early in the reign of Leo's predecessor Basil I (r. 867–86) and attributed to the patriarch Photios (fl. 858–86), was written soon after the Triumph of Orthodoxy explicitly to replace the *Ecloga*, tainted as it was by its iconoclast Isaurian origins.<sup>5</sup> Dieter Simon identifies it however as developing 'an idiosyncratic conception of law previously unheard of in Byzantine history'.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, the Photian introduction to the *Eisagoge* (also sometimes called the *Epanagoge*) makes a theological argument from the Christian doctrine of creation to claim that Byzantium ought to be ruled by a trinity of powers, in imitation of the trinitarian Godhead. This trinity – the emperor, the patriarch, and the law – was to rule in tandem, with the patriarch's role controversially articulated in relation to the emperor 'as the soul is to the body'.<sup>7</sup> Leo, of course, as a divinely appointed Christian ruler, could not allow his role to appear subservient to the patriarch, and the inevitable imperial changes to the law were produced under Leo's sponsorship. A further summary of the law, the *Procheiron*, was promulgated in the names of the Macedonian emperors (Basil, Leo, Alexander, and Stephen) before 879. According to the prefaces of the *Eisagoge* and the *Procheiron*, Basil I undertook two 'cleansings' of the Justinianic law in two compilations. As a result, at least one scholar has accused him of creating 'chaos for posterity'.<sup>8</sup> This chaotic profusion of legislation therefore required, in Leo's view, further purification and especially clarification.

Set beside the composition of the *Taktika* and other military writings from his youth, one might well wonder whether Leo VI had read the opening sentence of Justinian's *Institutes*, which proclaimed that 'in order to govern well, the emperor needed both weapons and law: the weapons for wartime, the law for peacetime'.<sup>9</sup> Leo's prolific legislative activity stands

<sup>4</sup> On the moral leadership of the emperor, especially in terms of physical spaces, see J. Shepard, 'Aspects of Moral leadership: The Imperial City and Lucre from Legality', in P. Armstrong (ed.), *Authority in Byzantium* (Farnham, 2013), 20–3.

<sup>5</sup> A. Schminck, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern* (Frankfurt, 1986), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Simon, 'Legislation', 16.

<sup>7</sup> Simon, 'Legislation', 17 (titles 8–10).

<sup>8</sup> Th. E. van Bochove, *To Date and Not To Date: On the Date and Status of Byzantine Law Books* (Groningen, 1996), 186.

<sup>9</sup> Const. Imperatoriam, para. 3, translated by Simon, 'Legislation', 1.

out as unusual among medieval Byzantine emperors, indeed ‘indisputably the most comprehensive collection of laws ever composed’.<sup>10</sup> This was no small accomplishment given that the Byzantine empire produced more legislation than any previously known civilization. To be fair, if one considers the Byzantine empire to have extended from the founding of the city in 330 to its fall to the Ottomans in 1453, that would also put Byzantium indisputably foremost in terms of longevity of empires.

Leo VI’s revision of the Byzantine law was produced in two parts: the reissue of his father’s legal work, known as the *Basilika*, and his own corpus of 113 new ordinances, known as ‘novels’ in Byzantine scholarship.<sup>11</sup> The *Basilika*, which appeared in the early years of Leo’s reign, summarized the legislation of Justinian in 60 books, but whether it appeared originally in four or six volumes remains uncertain.<sup>12</sup> These two together – the *Basilika* and the *Novels* – were intended to reform Byzantine law completely.<sup>13</sup> Leo’s introductory *prooimion* to the *Novels* described the endeavour as an *anakatharsis*, or cleansing. The same term, ἀνακάθαρσις, together with an extended rationale, appears at regular intervals three more times in the corpus of his *Novels*, in Novels 1, 42, and 94.<sup>14</sup> Thus these indicate Leo’s concern and approach to the theory of law in some detail. Leo reveals much more about his approach to legislation than has been previously discussed elsewhere in the scholarly literature on his Novels.

Contrary to previous scholarship that considered the *Novels* a ‘travail de cabinet’ intended to keep the emperor amused, Lokin has argued that Leo wanted his Novels to create new decisions like Justinian did, while also criticizing Justinian for doing so in a disorderly way.<sup>15</sup> Leo VI’s legislation was not merely a summary of the existing material but as a ‘cleansing’ (ἀνακάθαρσις), which meant that he declared some laws obsolete, summarized others, and also wrote new laws in an effort intended to make the legal standards of the empire suitable for an explicitly Christian people, chosen by God, and therefore called to a particular, perhaps

<sup>10</sup> Simon, ‘Legislation’, 21.

<sup>11</sup> S. N. Troianos, ‘Die Novellen Leons VI’, in S. N. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Athenensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 141–54.

<sup>12</sup> P. Pieler, ‘Byzantinische Rechtsliteratur’, in H. Hunger (ed.), *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 2: 456.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relationship between the Novels and the Basilika, see G. Dagon, ‘Lawful Society and Legitimate Power’, in A. Laiou and D. Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 27–51, esp. 38–46.

<sup>14</sup> A related word (ἐκκαθαίρειν) also appears in Novel 65.

<sup>15</sup> J. H. A. Lokin, ‘The Novels of Leo and the Decisions of Justinian’, in S. N. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Athenensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 131–40, at 133.

biblical, standard of living. Paul Magdalino has convincingly argued that this impulse of encyclopaedism was a primary feature of a deliberate imperial policy to reinforce the theological gains of 843 – the so-called ‘Triumph of Orthodoxy’ – and thereby create an orthodox imperial culture.<sup>16</sup> Leo’s legislative manoeuvres support this idea by clarifying orthodox positions and deepening their practical application for a broad swathe of circumstances.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Leo was imitating Justinian as a decision-maker, ruling on questions that arose as a result of inconsistency in application or in relation to canon law.<sup>18</sup>

In the *prooimion* to the Novels, Leo briefly explains his philosophy of law, and gives his rationale for this collection of ordinances. He begins in a philosophical vein, describing the vicissitudes of life and the many varied situations which give rise to multitudes of laws. These laws, he says, function as guardians of people’s lives, or even as physicians, in that they seek to prevent evil from invading society, or where it has arisen, to cut it off at the root, and thereby prevent it from taking over. However, this inconsistency of human governance also naturally tends towards the obsolescence of some laws, the forgetting of others, and even worse, new laws that contradict earlier ones. This leads to confusion and to the detriment of society, writes Leo.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, in order to remedy this confusion and disorder (ταραχή), Leo announces that he shall decide which laws are to be preserved and which to be rendered invalid. Those he fails to mention shall henceforth be considered invalid as well, he says, by virtue of not having been retained. Finally, he shall determine which customs have gained sufficient authority to be imbued with legal obligation, and these shall become new laws. Thus the emperor lays out in the *prooimion* his four-point plan for the *anakatharsis* of Byzantine law: good laws preserved, old laws invalidated, new laws designated by custom, and entirely new laws necessary for the flourishing of a Christian polity.<sup>20</sup> It is to be more than a mere ‘cleansing’;

<sup>16</sup> P. Magdalino, ‘Orthodoxy and History in Tenth-Century Byzantine “Encyclopedism”’, in Peter van Deun and Caroline Macé (eds.), *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?* (Leuven, 2011), 147.

<sup>17</sup> An interesting, if slightly dated, analysis of how historians approach legal material in Byzantium: B. H. Stolte, ‘Not New but Novel: Notes on the Historiography of Byzantine Law’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 22 (1998): 264–79.

<sup>18</sup> Lokin, ‘The Novels of Leo’, 137.

<sup>19</sup> P. Noailles and A. Dain (eds.), *Les nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage* (Paris, 1944), 7, lines 10–11.

<sup>20</sup> For a fuller discussion of this concept, including its use by other Byzantine emperors, see P. E. Pieter, ‘Ανακάθαρσις τῶν παλαιῶν νόμων und Makedonische renaissance’, *Subseciva Groningana* 3 (1989): 61–78 at 64. The corpus has also been recently published in modern Greek: S. N. Troianos, *Οι Νεαρές Λέοντος Σ΄ του Σοφού. Προλεγόμενα, κείμενο, απόδοση στη νεοελληνική, ευρετήρια και επίμετρο* (Athens, 2007).



it is to be a nuanced rejection of what came before, in favour of a new formulation.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Schminck is of the opinion that the primary objective of this collection of Novels was to abolish Justinianic regulations.<sup>22</sup> Leo decided to reshape the laws, either by affirming them, cancelling by declaring them permanently obsolete, or transforming mere customs into civil obligations. In addition, he writes entirely new laws in response to what he perceives as necessary for untangling the chaos of human life to make it more orderly, and therefore pleasing to both God and citizen. Indeed, 72 of the Novels have been identified as 'dealing with a collision with Justinian's legislation, eliminating a controversy or abolishing an obsolete institution'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, this collection of ordinances is to be considered the most up-to-date interpretation of civil law in force in the Byzantine empire in the later ninth century. This chapter will argue that they also constitute a revolution in legal theory designed to refine Byzantine Christian polity into a more religiously orthodox entity.

### Leo's Rationale for Legal Reform

In Novels 1, 42, and 94, as well as the *prooimion*, one finds clues to Leo's concept of *anakatharsis*. Novel 1 rather freely criticizes Justinian for enacting new laws which conflicted with and sometimes contradicted his earlier, admirable collection of clear and expurgated legislation. However, Leo contends that Justinian's subsequent new legislation created confusion and set the empire on a trajectory resulting in 'contradictions and controversies' (ἀντιλογίας καὶ ἔριδος),<sup>24</sup> particularly with regard to ordinary life. To remedy this situation, Leo sets out to reconcile conflicts in the existing laws, to repeal inappropriate laws, to confirm long-standing good customs, and to ameliorate severe laws to make them more just. Furthermore, he declares, only the *Basilika* of his father and his own legislation are to be considered valid henceforth, even if other law codes have been in use previously.

Novel 42 also reveals Leo's understanding of his legislative task and its motivations. The specific subject matter of this novel stipulates that imperfectly written wills shall be given the same legal validity as verbal wills. However, it is in his rationale for this change that the reader gets a

<sup>21</sup> Pieler calls Leo's legal project 'Verwerfung'. 'Ανακάθαρσις τῶν παλαιῶν νόμων', 66.

<sup>22</sup> A. Schminck, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern* (Frankfurt, 1986), 66, n.37.

<sup>23</sup> Lokin, 'The Novels of Leo', 137.

<sup>24</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 13, line 8.

glimpse of Leo's cognitive framework. He begins with an indictment of the obscurity of legal terminology, which he says 'envelops [its subject] in a thick cloud' (ἀχλύς ἐφηπλωμένη).<sup>25</sup> Leo intends to resolve the resulting confusion and ambiguity by bringing the illumination of clarity, and in so doing, to protect the dead, whose eternal felicity could be imperilled if their bequests are annulled for bureaucratic technicalities. This is somewhat astonishing, because it implies that a person's claim to divine compassion can be materially altered after death by the actions of the living. Whether this is theologically accurate or not, the fact that the emperor thought it was the case demonstrates a religiously motivated imperial concern for the spiritual condition of his people.

In Novel 94, which abolishes the office of the consul, Leo announces that laws like the one establishing the consul, which have long fallen into disuse or 'protracted silence' (ὅσα τῷ μακρῷ κατασιγασθέντα χρόνῳ)<sup>26</sup> are to become void. He does not stipulate the length of disuse, so presumably these are reckoned on the basis of his own discretion as imperial legislator. The office of consul, he explains, has become nothing more than a formality, and an ineffective one at that. Thus, he cancels such provisions as so much dead wood to be cleared away.

The notion of 'silence' in relation to legal statutes arises also in the *prooimion*, which speaks of laws having experienced such 'profound silence' (σιγῆ κρύψασσα βαθεία)<sup>27</sup> that they are plunged into oblivion. The problem, Leo contends, is that obsolescence in the legal code leads to contradictory laws being passed because of ignorance of those long-unknown laws, and thus conflicting legislation creates controversies. These result in an utter confounding of legislative affairs, so that laws can be interpreted in contradictory ways. Thus Leo intends his cleansing of the law to resolve the problems introduced by the silence of obsolescence and the cacophony of legislative disorder, because the flourishing of the empire depends upon good order.

However, one finds clear indications of Leo's views on legislation and government also offered in other parts of the *Novellae*. In Novel 67, for example, on the treatment of deserters who return home voluntarily, he begins with a substantial prolegomenon describing the right balance between severity and gentleness in government. He espouses a moderate approach, claiming that a ruler, no matter the size of his dominion, must

<sup>25</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 169, line 10.

<sup>26</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 311, lines 1–2.

<sup>27</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 7, line 2.

be able to mix gentleness and rigour. Leo believes that a failure to achieve this temperate balance will expose a ruler to contempt, because he will be perceived as either too harsh or too weak; such an outcome will render him completely unfit to rule, in Leo's view. The novel then goes on to advocate for gentleness towards a defector who desires to return home. This law is interesting because Leo cancels the previous penalty, which was extremely cruel: death by wild beasts, or death by impaling. This decision on Leo's part demonstrates an awareness of an empire more or less engaged in constant warfare, and demonstrates the biblical exhortation to Christians to show mercy.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Leo considers the previous penalty to be barbaric, especially when applied to a repentant defector. More than this, he views it as injurious to the Christian Byzantine *politeia*, preventing as it were a full repentance and restoration.

### Traces of Leo's Religion in His Legislation

The *Novels* in particular are noteworthy for several further reasons. First, they reveal Leo's belief, modelled after Justinian, that all temporal power resides with the emperor.<sup>29</sup> Quite literally, his word is law.<sup>30</sup> Second, they justify the new laws on the basis primarily that Byzantium is a Christian empire, and as such ought to be ruled by divine law, interpreted through the God-ordained emperor. One can discern this conviction in his *Procheiros Nomos* (dated to 907), which was to replace the *Eisagoge*, which had been composed by Photios between 880 and 886 and contained the aforementioned offending metaphor.<sup>31</sup> Leo's involvement in this project is plausible, principally for the competing political theories of the two collections: the earlier legislation makes the aforementioned controversial claim that the emperor is the body and the patriarch the soul, while the latter, Leo's *Procheiros Nomos*, claims precedence for the emperor over the patriarch.<sup>32</sup> As Photios's former pupil, Leo had gained a solid theological

<sup>28</sup> Mic 6:8; Luke 10:37 inter alia.

<sup>29</sup> Troianos sees Leo's work as expanding Justinian's legislation, particularly with regard to the legal force of conciliar decrees. *Οι Νεοαρές Λέγοντος*, 466.

<sup>30</sup> On the emperor's word as law, see D. Simon, 'Princeps legibus solutus. Die Stellung des byzantinischen Kaisers zum Gesetz', *Gedächtnisschrift für Wolfgang Kunkel* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 449–92. See also Dagron, 'Lawful Society and Legitimate Power', 39.

<sup>31</sup> Schminck, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern*, 1–15.

<sup>32</sup> This particular aspect of the legislation does not appear in Arabic translations made for the Melkite and Coptic communities of Christians living under Islamic hegemony, possibly because it was irrelevant for them. See J. Pahlitzsch, 'The Translation of the Byzantine *Procheiros Nomos* into Arabic: Techniques and Cultural Context', *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007), 19–29.

and philosophical understanding of the Orthodox Christian outlook, yet deposed Photios from the patriarchal see of Constantinople upon his own accession to the imperial purple. Leo appeared to believe that he would be overshadowed by his former teacher, so long as the patriarch considered himself analogous to the animating soul of the emperor's body. No ruler wants to be a puppet.

Most scholars do not see much originality in Leo's legal theories. Simon finds the 'intellectual content' of Leo's *prooimion* 'meager', and identifies only two ideas in it: that the 'inconstancy of human life' induced Leo to intervene by means of these new laws and that Leo describes his legal activity in a 'pre-Justinian-Hellenic metaphorical sense ... without any Christian basis'.<sup>33</sup> While this may be true of the *prooimion*, it is certainly not an accurate reflection of the novels themselves, many of which carry explicitly ideological prefaces. Since the *Novels* represent a composition more original to Leo than his father's *Basilika*, the rest of this chapter will focus on the content, scope, and significance of the former.

### Scope of Leo's Legislation in the *Novels*

The French translators of the *Novels* consider them to have been promulgated as one corpus, saying they have 'the character of a μονόβιβλος'.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, they refer internally to one another and follow a discernible pattern, if not one that is intuitive to modern Western legal theory. Although some doubt has recently been cast on this theory, most scholars agree that 'the possibility that the novella were codified into one unified text during the lifetime of Leo cannot be ruled out altogether'.<sup>35</sup> Ostrogorsky believes that it would be a mistake to 'overestimate the extent of Leo's personal contribution' to Byzantine legislation, noting that 'the great period of legislative activity falls in the first decade of his reign, i.e., in the period when Stylianos Zaoutzes was still at his side'.<sup>36</sup> The guidance and influence of Zaoutzes should not be overlooked; fully 88 of the 113 novels are addressed specifically to Stylianos, indicating his approval and likely involvement in drafting them.

<sup>33</sup> Simon, 'Legislation', 19.

<sup>34</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, ix. A modern Greek translator and editor agrees with this assessment, arguing that if the *Novels* were not issued as such, they quickly became a single corpus. See Troianos, *Οι Νεαρές Λέοντος*, 17–26.

<sup>35</sup> S. N. Troianos, 'Canon Law to 1100', in W. Hartmann and K. Pennington (eds.), *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500* (Washington, DC, 2012), 154.

<sup>36</sup> G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, tr. J. Hussey (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969, reprinted 1999), 243.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Leo himself did not have direct input, particularly for his novels, because they offer overtly theological prolegomena, which stress the importance of each novel for the flourishing of an explicitly Christian state. It is this theological character that sets apart the legislation promulgated under the name of Leo VI, and as such, is therefore unsurprisingly influenced by biblical language, thought, and worldview.

The scope of the *Novels* includes many quotidian concerns, mostly related to social customs and financial practices. Leo addresses social customs like marriage, sex, adoption, food, and magic. He also intends to regulate financial practices governing work, slaveholding, inheritance and property rights, taxes, and charging interest on loans. Two further areas attracted Leo's attention in these novels: legal administration and church law. The legal rules he writes are primarily administrative, such as criteria for the validity of contracts and who can be a witness in a judicial proceeding. In the area of church law, Leo appears deeply concerned with the lifestyles and behaviour of monks and priests, setting regulations for where they should live and with whom. There are also a few novels that address criminal law, particularly concerning theft, perjury, and treason. Many of these categories are inevitably somewhat arbitrary and overlapping. For example, Novel 110, which addresses property owned by a married woman, is concerned with both financial and social matters.

Perhaps the best way to discuss Leo's *Novels* is to follow his own plan of organization. That is to say, following the logic of his four-point plan for reshaping the law might prove a fruitful way of understanding his priorities and purposes. To understand this legislation on its own terms, in what follows, the *Novels* will be examined according to how Leo shaped them: first, existing laws and customs that he affirmed; second, those he cancelled; third, those he modified; and fourth, those he wrote entirely new. The third and fourth categories also have some overlap, since a good Byzantine would never write anything entirely new, but rather reinterpret older material in a new way without admitting it to be new.

### **Laws Affirmed**

What does Leo consider worth affirming? In other words, what laws accord with his vision of a Christian polity governed by legislation in harmony with Orthodox belief? Most of the laws he affirms fall into two categories – ecclesiastical practice and administrative regulations.

In terms of church law, Leo affirms laws concerning who may join the priesthood (Novels 2–4) or monastic orders (6), at what ages (6, 16), and under what circumstances a man might leave his ecclesiastical vocation (11). For example, Novel 4 changes the law that disallowed priests ‘not attached to the General Church’ to perform the eucharistic liturgy or other rites in private chapels or homes. Leo considers it a misguided law for three reasons: it does not protect the purity/welfare of the Church, it does not prevent apostate priests from doing private services, and it deprives Christians of Eucharist, liturgies, and even prayers for the memory of the dead, which does harm to both the dead and the living.<sup>37</sup>

He affirms rules concerning the use of church property (12, 14, 15, 73) and creates new laws about its management (5, 13). For example, Novel 12 affirms the decree of Constantine that the profits of the (now 1100) shops attached to the Holy Church of God (τῆ ἀγία τοῦ θεοῦ) should be earmarked for burial costs for the poor, instead of the many other things for which these funds were apparently being misused. Leo does not specify where the income from these shop rents is going, only that they are not going to pay for worship in the church, nor for funerals for the indigent. He specifically decrees that Constantine’s wishes are to be honoured in this respect, but does not give a specific reason, other than to laud Constantine’s brilliant leadership.<sup>38</sup>

Novel 6 presents an interesting approach to a problem by not really resolving it. The legal inconsistency that Leo seeks to harmonize are two rules concerning the age at which a boy may take monastic vows: Basil of Caesarea contends that it should 16 or 17, while the later Sixth Ecumenical Council decrees that it can be as early as 10. In a puzzling, and yet typically Byzantine way, Leo’s response to this either/or question is ‘yes’. He says that both ages are acceptable, with one caveat: a ten-year-old may not dispose of his property, but a teenager may. Why? What makes the difference, in Leo’s view? Leo interprets Basil’s decree as allowing for precisely this problem, that is, the disposal of property. In other words, Basil chose the older age so that the monk would be old enough to dispose of his own property. Leo considers age not to be an impediment to taking the monastic habit, but decrees that any monk who dies before the age of 16 or 17 was not old enough to determine who should inherit his property;

<sup>37</sup> S. N. Troianos, ‘Οι “εκκλησιαστικές” Νεαρές του Λέοντος ζ’ και οι πηγές τους’, in Troianos, *Οι νεαρές Λέοντος*, 445–67, at 449.

<sup>38</sup> The editors of the French critical edition identify this novel as re-establishing Justinian’s Novel 43, found in his *Basilika* 54.4. Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 50, n.3.

thus, the property of a young monk under age 16 who dies is to be divided between his relatives, who receive one-third, and the church, which receives two-thirds. If he has no relatives, all of it goes to the church; in any case, any slaves he might have owned are to gain their freedom.

His affirmations of laws relating to the church are generally focused on visible practices, like the ages of monks and subdeacons, or the use of shops, or whether priests are living with women not their wives. Elsewhere, he affirms customs that seem to him reasonable for a Christian polity to uphold, like adding a penalty to the breaking of a betrothal so that the person breaking it must not only forfeit the betrothal gift but pay an additional penalty. In this way, Leo hopes to induce the populace to keep their promises to marry. He also affirms Justinianic laws<sup>39</sup> about minimum ages (boys 14, girls 12) for marriage (74, 109) as well as inheritance and administrative rules of the civil courts (97, 99, 107, 108, 110). He also affirms a more recent law on the subject of punishment for rapists (35), upholding his father's legislation in the *Basilika* (60.58).<sup>40</sup>

Administrative regulations affirmed by Leo concerned mainly fiscal matters. For example, Novel 13 reveals that in Leo's day, government officials were lining their pockets with rental income from city buildings dedicated to serving the poor: churches, hospitals, and houses for widows and orphans. He decrees that they may not charge any more than twice what the contract stipulates. Whether this is true justice is perhaps debatable, but Leo's intention is to rein in the avarice of his own officials.

### Laws Cancelled or Deemed Permanently Obsolete

In contrast to the laws he decides to keep, how does Leo get around the Byzantine disinclination for change? How does he justify cancelling old laws? First, he does not abrogate them altogether, but changes them enough so that they may be considered new laws; this is more fully justified by his theory of justice.<sup>41</sup> Second, he expresses his concern for the 'ordinary business of life' and in particular, for the necessity of removing contradictions and confusion so that justice might prevail.<sup>42</sup>

He goes on in Novel 2 to overturn the law forbidding bishops to have children, but to affirm celibacy of priests in Novel 3. Here he cites the

<sup>39</sup> V. Vuolanto 'Child and Parent in Roman Law', in C. Ando, K. Tuori, and P. J. du Plessis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Law and Society* (Oxford, 2016), 487–96, at 489.

<sup>40</sup> Van Bochove, *To Date and Not to Date*, 158.

<sup>41</sup> See more detailed discussion of this in [Chapter 6](#).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Novel 1.

'ancient canons' and 'tradition', which likely refer to Canons 5 and 17 of the Apostles, concerning the ordination of bishops without mentioning children, and Canons 12 and 48 of Trullo, which recommend elevation to a bishopric only for married priests who accept the dissolution of their marriages.<sup>43</sup> Novel 3 contravenes contemporary custom, which held that although a man must normally remain celibate after ordination, he could get married within two years after ordination. Leo considers this improper, because it conflicts with previously established canons of the church, which expressly forbade marriage after ordination.<sup>44</sup> Thus by banning the custom, he restores what he considers the proper order: first marriage (if at all), then ordination (without a requirement for celibacy, if married).

There is an evident contradiction in these two novels: a bishop may have legitimate children, but he must be celibate. As Troianos has noted, the Justinianic legislation contradicted the canons, which do not forbid men with children from becoming bishops.<sup>45</sup> How is this helpful for a Christian empire? Leo's reasoning goes like this: the canons forbid men with children to become bishops, but permits them to become priests. The reason for the prohibition is the fear that bishops with children will give them preference, or worse, provide for those children out of the wealth of the church (which, it is implied, is intended for use elsewhere).<sup>46</sup> However, Leo alludes to the canons that permit bishops to provide for indigent relatives from church coffers otherwise, and deems this prohibition against providing for children to be, in effect, hypocritical. If the church were truly concerned with the families of bishops receiving largesse, why is this denied to children, but granted to brothers, sisters, or other relatives? He makes an argument based on logic and reason rather than by direct appeal to scripture. However, he indirectly refers to the 'divinely inspired' canons as justification for this abrogation of an old civil law. Furthermore, he anathematizes anyone who might change the law to reflect a prohibition in future.

Most interestingly, he cancels old laws pertaining to the church in favour of instituting canon law by civil decree. For example, he replaces a Justinianic law about runaway monks with the stricter canon law (Novel

<sup>43</sup> The original prohibition of Justinian in 528 concerned only priests with children, but was amended in 531 to include celibacy. See S. N. Troianos, 'The Canons of the Trullan Council in the Novels of Leo VI', in G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Rome, 1995), 189–98, n.2 at 189.

<sup>44</sup> See Canon 4, Council of Ancyra, and Canon 6, Council in Trullo.

<sup>45</sup> Troianos, 'Canons', 190.

<sup>46</sup> Such concerns were proved valid by the experience of the Western church in later centuries, which instituted celibacy for all priests on just these grounds.



8).<sup>47</sup> His tinkering with laws affecting churchmen does not end there. Novel 5 permits monks to dispose of the property they brought into the monastery with them by will, and to dispose of two-thirds of the property they acquired while a monk.

What is new or different about this? First, this law is addressed to Stephen, the patriarch of Constantinople, who appears to have brought it to Leo as a question. The patriarch's question was whether monks were permitted or forbidden to dispose of private property after having become monks. At that time, the ancient laws decreed that anyone who became a monk had to dispose of all his property prior to taking monastic vows, and if he failed to do this, his property would automatically become the property of the Church. If the patriarch asked this question, then likely there may have been either confusion or controversy concerning the property of some (perhaps wealthy) men who had become monks. The emperor's answer was to differentiate between men who had children and those who did not, before they took their monastic vows. For those without children, Leo says the law stands.

However, for those with children, Leo's new inheritance laws were a bit more complex. Should a monk who is a father die with a will that had been prepared before he became a monk, the provisions for the children shall stand and the rest be bequeathed to his monastery or church. If a monk who is also a father dies after taking monastic vows and acquiring other property as a monk, then he no longer has the right to dispose of that property as though it were his own; it belongs to the church. However, if at the time he entered the monastery, he consecrated some of his property to the church, then upon his death, he may dispose of two-thirds of his property as he wishes, but one-third shall go to the church. The distinction between fathers and non-fathers is an interesting one. This may be one example where Leo VI is demonstrating his Solomonic wisdom by seeking to provide for the children of monks, without compromising the rights of monasteries. Furthermore, it was common practice in Byzantium for old soldiers to retire, as it were, in monasteries, where the ascetic and communal quality of life was most similar to army discipline.

Indeed, Leo appears to admire martial discipline quite a lot, to the extent that he considers soldiers able to become monks but not necessarily vice versa. In Novel 8, Leo finds an inconsistency in an ancient law that decreed a monk, fleeing his vows, should be compelled to take them up again only once. Subsequent abdication of monastic vows would result in

<sup>47</sup> See fuller discussion on this Novel in [Chapter 6](#).

the erstwhile monk being forced to join the army. Leo decides that not only is it ridiculous to allow a monk to leave, provided he does it more than once, but he is displeased with the idea that the army should be filled with men who failed to keep monastic vows. Therefore, he decrees that a monk who leaves his monastery should be compelled to return, no matter how many times he leaves. Leo does not want failed monks in the army, and he does not believe they should be allowed to take up their former secular lives either. This latter he compares using the vivid biblical metaphor of dogs returning to their vomit.<sup>48</sup>

The emperor was also concerned with his version of what might be called fiscal justice. In Novel 83, Leo cancels a previous ban on charging interest – this was established before 879 in Basil I's *Procheiron* 16,14 – and reconfigures it so that interest may be charged on loans, but only up to a maximum of 4 per cent annually.<sup>49</sup> What makes this new law especially interesting in light of Leo's professed ideal of Christian justice is that it goes directly against Basil I's determination that charging interest was usury and therefore ought to be illegal. Complicating the matter is Basil's rationale: he cites the condemnation of this practice in canon law, which one might normally expect to sway Leo, but in this case, it does not.<sup>50</sup> This example represents an outlier in Leo's legislative thought. In most scenarios addressed by his Novels, he prefers canon law over civil law, viewing it as morally superior by virtue of having been written by bishops inspired by the Holy Spirit. Where he finds flaws in civil law, Leo's remedy is to apply ecclesiastical canons.

### Laws Transformed from Custom to Civil Obligation

Novel 9 essentially closes a loophole, by affirming an ecclesiastical canon, which holds that slaves who become priests (and therefore free men) without the knowledge of their masters shall be stripped of their office and returned to slavery.<sup>51</sup> This canon Leo raises to the status of a civil obligation because, as he says, he wishes to enforce ecclesiastical discipline, and particularly the divine canons.

<sup>48</sup> Prov 26:11, 'As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.'

<sup>49</sup> Van Bochove, *To Date and Not To Date*, 159.

<sup>50</sup> Basil I's *Procheiron* cites Canon 44 of the 85 Apostolic Canons, as well as Canon 17 of the Council of Nicaea; both of these are ancient, firmly established heavy hitters of canon law.

<sup>51</sup> See Canon 82 of the 85 Apostolic Canons, affirmed at the Council in Trullo, but dating to earlier centuries.

Novel 10 closes another loophole for the runaway slave who takes monastic vows, namely, it abolishes the three-year rule for punishment of said runaway. In other words, previously a slave could run away, join a monastery and, if not discovered for three years, would have his freedom. Leo finds this an abuse of the honourable status of a monk and declares that any runaway monk who does this shall not regain his freedom after three years, but shall lose it whenever he is discovered, regardless of how long he might have been on the lam. Leo's justification for this is the inherent honour of the monastic vow, and the calling incumbent upon any Christian slave to embrace a life of suffering in imitation of Jesus Christ. If such a slave is unwilling to suffer under a harsh master, Leo asks, how can he claim that he is imitating Christ, and thus, how can he be a good monk? These two conditions are in Leo's mind exclusive: one can be a good slave or a good monk but not both as a runaway.

Novel 11 closes yet another loophole with regard to a slave who has run away, taken priestly orders, and remained undiscovered for so long that he attains to the office of bishop. Leo, in consistency with the previous two novels, decrees that even a bishop, who is discovered to be a furtively escaped slave, shall be stripped of office and returned to his master. Here he explicitly compares such a slave to a thief, who is compelled to return what he has stolen. Likewise, the implication is that a runaway slave has stolen his episcopal office and therefore has no right to retain it, because it was granted under false pretences.

### **New Laws with Tweaks on Old Ones**

Leo weighs in on a wide variety of issues, employing religious rhetoric that gives this work a parainetic flavour. Indeed, he views himself as the spiritual father of his subjects, and thus comfortably adopts a prescriptive approach. His *Novellae* are not merely pronouncements of law, but mini-treatises which express opinion, rationale, and priorities. For example, Novel 53 addresses ordinances to govern the dead, ruling on the legality of burial within the city walls. The purpose of the novel was to make it possible for the poor to mourn their dead at a suitable gravesite inside the city, rather than dumping corpses unceremoniously outside the city walls, where Mediterranean cultures from antiquity normally buried the dead. Leo says that it is more appropriate for Christians to be able to honour their dead, who are called servants of God and who are surrounded by celestial glory, whether they are buried inside or outside

the city.<sup>52</sup> This shows a sensitivity for the dignity of human beings in mourning, regardless of economic station, and an administrative concern for civic order as well as Christian views on death and burial. For Christians, burial rather than cremation after death was viewed as necessary, not only to imitate Christ, but also to repudiate the pagan burnings of Christian martyrs intended to mock the Christian belief in physical resurrection.<sup>53</sup>

It must be said that this law was directed squarely at the living and their ability to honour the dead, not for some morbid purpose concerning the well-being of the dead themselves. The Byzantines did not view death with fear but merely as an inevitable change of circumstance.<sup>54</sup> The observation of appropriate funeral rituals remained a constant concern for the Byzantines throughout the life of the empire, and Leo VI understood this.<sup>55</sup> These rituals involved visiting the tomb on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death – the memorial days that give opportunity to the bereaved to make offerings, recite invocations, and often, have a feast and sing laments.<sup>56</sup> Without a tomb, this part of the ritual is impossible. Leo's concern in addressing burial laws was therefore not intended to retain civil order in the sense of preventing the dumping of bodies outside the walls, but rather more proactively, to provide the living with appropriate ways to mourn ritually as Christians, and thereby to encourage *taxis* as an effect of Orthodox living. It represents a legislative reordering of social priorities on the basis of religious conviction.

In a related manner, Novel 96, on the violation of tombs, seeks to reconcile a harsh civil law with a rather more lenient ecclesiastical canon, which prescribes no penalty. Leo tweaks the civil law by decreeing pardons for first offences, because there should be provision, he says, for the weakness of an offender's motivations, whether because of nature or poverty. In the case of a second offence, Leo adheres to the civil penalty of tonsure and scourging.

<sup>52</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 204–5.

<sup>53</sup> N. Condas, 'Death and Dying in Byzantium', in D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2006), 124–45, at 135.

<sup>54</sup> G. T. Dennis, 'Death in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), 1–7. Condas, 'Death and Dying', 139.

<sup>55</sup> For a fuller discussion of funeral rituals and laments, see Margaret Alexiou's classic study, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974).

<sup>56</sup> Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 46–7.

### Leo's Legal Theory in Practice

Leo's philosophy of legislation reveals a man deeply concerned not just with rightly ordering society, but with ordering it in a way that made manifest the theological and ecclesial commitments of a Christian *oikoumene*. To that end, his novels focus on marriage, church practices, especially financial practices, family obligations, and property law. All of these are highly visible social arenas where others not committed to Orthodox Christian living could observe its effects. Only ten of Leo's *Novels* concern what one might call administrative law, that is, novels which repeal old laws, establish penalties, or refer to other procedural legal matters. Such laws do not regulate practice or custom or other visible measures of social interaction, but are merely placeholders for record-keeping and paperwork. The visibility evident in the rest of the novels demonstrably affects the daily lives of citizens in ways that they would recognize. For example, Novel 54 forbids working on Sundays, Novels 43 and 48 establish that witnesses to contracts are not required to be literate, but may not be women. Novels 3 and 79 establish marriage as legitimate only before taking vows, and enumerate penalties for church officers marrying after such vows. If cultural anthropologists are correct that religious commitments comprise the deepest yet least visible facets of human cultures, then Leo's programme of making such commitments publicly visible represents a significant sharpening of cultural identity as well as coercion to embrace that identity. It is an unusual priority for a legislator.

In accord with his desire that Orthodox lifestyle be publicly visible, Leo instituted Novel 54, which prohibited citizens from working on Sundays. The text of Novel 54 begins with an interesting criticism of laws that allow exceptions to the prohibition against Sunday work, saying that such exceptions have the appearance of godliness in a certain way, but in fact these exceptions show disrespect and are without legitimate foundation. The novel continues with a call to Christians to observe the Day of the Resurrection of the Lord (δεσπότης), as exhorted in the law of the apostles.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, this homiletical novel goes on, claiming that failure to do this on one day out of seven shows a lack of respect for the law given by the Holy Spirit; human beings should not make laws that conflict with divine laws, says Leo. Indeed,

<sup>57</sup> The French editors cite Photios's *Nomocanon* for clarification, and propose that here Leo refers to Canon 10 of Nicaea, Canon 29 of Laodicea, Canon 61 of Carthage, Canons 19 and 66 of Trullo, and Canon 15 of Peter of Alexandria. Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 206, n.1.

Leo points to the observance of the Jews as an example to follow in this regard. To fail to obey this law instituted by God and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the councils demonstrates complete ignorance (παντελῶς ἀσυνείδητον). Leo ends the novel with a rhetorical question: why are six days intended for work not sufficient to do the work needed? It is a rhetorical question because the appeal to the authority of the Ten Commandments (specifically the fourth, which enjoins faithful keeping of the Sabbath) assumes that good Christians are obedient Christians, who not only know these scriptures, but understand their rationale.

The Byzantine polity was not only to be proactively Christian, it was, in Leo's view, also to avoid any appearance of heterodoxy. Thus in Novel 65, he specifically addresses interactions with demons and magic. In particular, he addresses spells or incantations spoken to attain health or wealth, and explicitly forbids them on pain of death. This is quite a severe punishment, but Leo justifies it on the grounds that it invokes demons, thus causing spiritual injury that outweighs any material benefit. The problem, in Leo's view, was that earlier legislation both approved and disapproved of such spells on the same grounds, justifying them because, although evil, they can on occasion bring about some good and are therefore legal. Leo's rationale is that the law is therefore inconsistent, ignores the greater evil done by invoking demons, and therefore ought to be repealed. He not only changes the law, but adds the highest penalty possible: death. This death is not only death as a retributive justice, but death as the wages of apostasy, in Leo's eyes. In other words, casting spells is not only illegal, it is explicitly prohibited by Christian religion as Leo interprets it.

Novel 7 presents a brief but interesting theory of Leo's, namely, that civil law is stronger and better founded than ecclesiastical law. In light of this understanding, Leo decrees that a formerly ecclesiastical law shall now have the force of civil law. The law in question concerns whether a man may renounce his clerical office for a secular one. The answer is no. Anyone who does this shall be compelled to take up the clerical office again. For an emperor who apparently viewed canon law as morally superior to civil law, his actions suggest a pragmatic understanding of the strength of civil law backed by imperial authority.

### **Laws Affecting Explicit Ecclesiastical Practice**

Novel 17, which begins with an apparently modest but pro forma comment that the emperor is not as qualified to rule on such matters as the patriarch (to whom the novel is addressed), declares it lawful to baptize or

give the Eucharist to a woman within 40 days after childbirth if she is in danger of dying. This adjustment to ecclesiastical practice represents an imperial tweak to standard church policy of the time, changing it by legislative fiat. Normally, a woman who had given birth was considered unclean for 40 days, because she was still bleeding. Unclean people were forbidden from taking the Eucharist, or indeed, being baptized. Leo takes exception to this law in the name of mercy, saying that a woman should not be permitted to die in such circumstances, either unbaptized or out of communion, because of the danger such a practice poses to her eternal soul. Here Leo is clearly departing from accepted Orthodox practice of the era; in effect, he is imposing a change to sacramental doctrine and practice. Indeed, Troianos observes that this is one instance where the emperor is directly contradicting the authority of the patriarch.<sup>58</sup> At the end of the novel, Leo slips in another remark about allowing a newborn child to be baptized and given the Eucharist after eight days (instead of the usual forty) in cases where the child was in mortal danger from illness.

The cultural and religious position underpinning this new law reveals a poignant conviction about the status of unbaptized babies in Orthodox belief. Baptism, in Orthodox theology, confers an identity, a de facto personhood necessary for eternal felicity after death. Unbaptized babies were not believed to go to heaven after death; indeed, negligence on the part of the parents to baptize their baby was seen as a kind of spiritual murder.<sup>59</sup> This draws a clear distinction to Augustine's dictum that babies are inherently guilty because they are born in sin.<sup>60</sup> The eastern view, by contrast, held that parents were guilty for failing to baptize their children, not the babies themselves.

Novel 73, addressed to Stylianos, Leo's *basileopator*, reiterates an ecclesiastical canon from the Sixth Ecumenical Council, namely, the prohibition against priests or laymen living with (συνοῖκεν) women in houses attached to the church (ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ὑπερώοις). The Council stipulated that priests found guilty of this should be defrocked, and laymen denied communion.<sup>61</sup> Leo claims that this offence remained unpunished up until the time of the Council, and the penalties in the canon were not enforced

<sup>58</sup> Troianos, *Οἱ νεαρές Λέοντος*, 454.

<sup>59</sup> J. Baun, 'The Fate of Babies Dying Before Baptism in Byzantium', in D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood* (Oxford, 1994), 115–25 at 118, 123.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.7.11. Cf. Baun, 'Fate of Babies', 116.

<sup>61</sup> Canon 97, Council in Trullo, prescribes expulsion for men living with women within church precincts and thus making a sacred place common. Those who do not obey the canon are to be forever deprived of their ecclesiastical office (clergy) or forever excommunicated (laity).

even after the Council decreed them. Leo's father wrote civil laws supporting this decree, but Leo considers himself compelled to do the same, in accord with his project of cleansing the laws and finishing his father's legislative work, in addition to writing his own additions. The violation of this ecclesiastical decree, says Leo, demonstrates contempt for the (presumably civil) law and also profanes sacred things (καταφρονήσεως καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν κοινοποιίας). Leo's novel strengthens the penalty by extending it to those who permit such activity or give permission for any priest or layman to live with a woman in such a house. Leo views these houses as sacred space and, in line with conciliar tradition, considers them unavailable for men and women in live in together. Leo calls this an abuse perpetrated in religious houses that defiles those establishments. Perpetrators are to be evicted by imperial authority, and anyone who permitted the abuse is to be held responsible and deprived of his office. This penalty is somewhat severe and indicates the seriousness with which Leo viewed this offence.

### Marriage Laws

Significantly, Leo does at times make new laws on the basis of common sense and logical consistency, as he understands it, rather than on explicit religious principles. For example, in Novel 112, he makes the case for granting divorce on grounds of mental or spiritual illness: if a husband becomes insane, Leo stipulates that the wife can seek a divorce after five years of her husband's insanity. In the prolegomenon to this novel, Leo insists that he is neither approving nor disapproving of earlier legislators who disallowed divorce on grounds of spousal insanity, nor is he criticizing them, but he does admit to being in disagreement with them on surprisingly extrabiblical grounds. That is to say, he does not object to previous laws disallowing divorce for reasons of spousal insanity because of any religious or spiritual principle, but rather he constructs an argument based on logic. It is irrational, says Leo, to disallow marriage in the first place on the grounds that one of the parties is insane, but simultaneously to deny that a marriage be ended on the same grounds. This effectively meant that it was illegal to marry an insane person, but also illegal to divorce one! He compares it to a physician willing to administer prophylactic medicines but not healing ones. Thus Leo deems this inconsistency in the law to be an absurdity.

Furthermore, Leo goes on to reveal rather a romantic view of marriage as a source of joy and comfort, neither of which is possible for a woman married to a madman. Indeed, he waxes almost eloquent about the



happiness that marriage is supposed to bring because of the lifelong bond it sanctifies. However, he also acknowledges the incompatibility of these goals with insanity, which discourages physical intimacy. Here Leo expresses a near universal human reaction to insanity, namely, it is not sexy, and because of this, will not lead to children, which are one of the main blessings of marriage in the biblical view. He then goes on to make two more remarks. The first is the obvious and unsurprising argument that of course society does not benefit from the birth of children sired by madmen. The second remark, while perhaps offered in all earnestness, provides some glimpse – intended or not – of humour: ‘if anyone should find this conclusion, to a certain extent, reprehensible, let him subject himself to the experience of a similar matrimonial union, and he will soon acknowledge to how much weight his opinion is entitled.’ In other words, should anyone disagree with Leo’s wisdom in this, that person ought to test such an opinion in the crucible of personal experience.

Leo himself cites a number of other laws which he considers less severe circumstances where divorce is permissible, so it is likely that the pronouns in this novel tacitly acknowledge the assumption that a man can obtain a divorce much more easily and on flimsier grounds, thus eliminating the need for masculine pronouns here.<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, Leo makes a passing reference to the religious aspect of the Byzantine Orthodox wedding ceremony: the practice of sharing the Eucharist during the liturgy. He states that when someone develops insanity on the wedding day, even after the sharing of the Eucharist, the marriage is dissolved. In the next line he anticipates objections to this statement and defends his decision by contesting the interpretation of ‘nuptial benediction’. Leo argues that the act that joins a married couple in the sharing of the Eucharist is not impossible to break if that act was undertaken by an insane person. He cites no scripture, no tradition, no patristic writers, and no canons. He merely makes a baldly confident assertion. The modern reader is struck by his certainty regarding the nature and purpose of marriage. This confidence is all the more fascinating in light of his own tragic marital history.

This is particularly meaningful in light of Leo’s own violation of long-established marriage laws, including one of his own more recent ones. Novel 90 concerns those who contract a third marriage, making them

<sup>62</sup> The other grounds for divorce cited by Leo include spousal profligacy (Novel 93), abortion (Novel 31), difference of religion (Novel 93), failure to pay what is stipulated in the marital contract (Novel 18), and slave status of the wife (Novel 33).

subject to the punishments of the holy canons. Here Leo appeals to the status of human beings as creatures endowed with reason and therefore, in theory at least, superior to the animals. This anthropology finds its basis in the scriptural description of humanity as created in God's image to rule over the animals. (Gen 1:26–27) He points to animals that mate for life only once as in that regard superior to human beings who enter a second marriage, which he describes as 'without shame' (οὐδεν αἰδομένη).<sup>63</sup> However, when it comes to third marriages, Leo invokes the 'Law of the Holy Spirit' (δὸγματι τοῦ Πνεύματος), and the sacred canon (ιερός κανὼν).<sup>64</sup> This is an area where Leo explicitly defers to the Church's conciliar decisions on marriage.

Since Leo VI is well known for having scandalously married a fourth time, in direct violation of the earlier *Procheiron* (IV, 25), the related novels he promulgated shed some light on his willingness to disobey the ancient canons.<sup>65</sup> Novel 91 abolished Justinian's law permitting concubines, which had been a concession to Roman tradition.<sup>66</sup> However, Leo did not establish any penalties for those who continued the custom, possibly because he himself notably kept a concubine, Zoe Karbonopsina, who eventually became the mother of his only living son. The rhetoric Leo uses in the novel strikes an oddly discordant note. He harshly describes those who live together with concubines as shamelessly degrading themselves (ἐπιψόγος συμφθίρεσθαι . . . οὐκ αἰδομένοις)<sup>67</sup> and indeed, bringing dishonour to the Byzantine *politeia*. For these reasons, Leo cancels forever the law permitting concubinage in order to bring Byzantine civil law into conformity with divine precepts (κατὰ τὰ θεῖα).<sup>68</sup> The editors of the French translation of the *Novels* believe that Leo was referring to Canon 4 of Gregory of Nyssa and Canon 59 of Basil of Caesarea.<sup>69</sup> Basil's canon occurs in a list of capital sins that require public penance, and disallows fornication, while Gregory of Nyssa gives a more extended explanation for the necessity of penance for this sin. This canon compares any sexual act outside of a monogamous marriage to adultery, bestiality, and pederasty. It notes that the penalties are stricter for those who are caught involuntarily, but foresees some flexibility for offenders who confess freely. If Noailles and Dain are

<sup>63</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 299, line 5.

<sup>64</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 299, lines 11 and 15.

<sup>65</sup> N. Oikonomides, 'Leo VI's Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages: An Interpolation in the "Procheiros Nomos" (IV, 25–27)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 173–93, at 188.

<sup>66</sup> Oikonomides, 'Leo VI's Legislation of 907', 190.

<sup>67</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301, lines 1–2.

<sup>68</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301, line 5.

<sup>69</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 300, n.2.

correct, then Leo views himself as part of a long and faithful tradition of Christian lawgivers.

Novel 89, most notably, for the first time required the ecclesiastical blessing for marriages, a change that Meyendorff has called 'something of a legal and social watershed'.<sup>70</sup> Previously, Orthodox marriages were solemnized by two methods only. The first, coronation, was a pagan practice adopted by Christians that symbolized victory over the temptations of carnal pleasure; this was reserved for first marriages only.<sup>71</sup> The second way was by means of a civil contract, following ancient Roman custom, and therefore also not intrinsically a Christian practice. Under Leo, the explicit blessing of the Church was made a legal requirement, in keeping with his desire to bring the Byzantine polity into closer conformity with explicitly Christian practice. Although Christian marriage ceremonies early on had included ecclesiastical ritual, this was often limited to receiving the Eucharist from a Christian priest and being crowned either by a priest or by one's new father-in-law.<sup>72</sup> This is interesting because such a blessing involves a public ceremony, but Leo's marriage to Zoe, his fourth wife, was contracted in secret. Leo's stated rationale for this new law was his attempt to accord the same honour to marriage as to adoption of children. It seems clear that the legitimacy of children and marriage bonds were a priority for Leo VI, made perhaps more poignant by his own desire for a legitimate heir.

And yet, it is clear that Leo attempted to live a life in accord with the divine canons, as indeed he wished all Byzantine citizens to do. He foresees only two obstacles to a proper church wedding. Novel 74 stipulates that betrothed couples may not receive the nuptial benediction unless the woman is at least 12 and the man at least 15 years of age, as decreed in Canon 98 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. The other situation that could impede the nuptial benediction is in the case of divorced women who desire to remarry: Leo says this is adultery. In this, at least, he is consistent between his law and his life.<sup>73</sup> He himself only remarried after each of his wives died. There were for Leo no living ex-wives, nor were there any ex-husbands for any of his wives.

<sup>70</sup> J. Meyendorff, 'Christian Marriage in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 99–107, at 105.

<sup>71</sup> Canon of Patriarch Nikephoros (r. 806–15), Canon 2. G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles (eds.), *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων* (Athens, 1852–9, reprinted 1966), 4: 27.

<sup>72</sup> Crowning by the father of the bridegroom recommended by John Chrysostom (Ep. 231). Cf. Meyendorff, 'Christian Marriage', 104. Reception of the Eucharist as part of the marriage liturgy was identified by Tertullian as a sign of Christian marriage (*Ad uxorem*, 11.6).

<sup>73</sup> This novel is about impediments to church weddings, not about divorced women as such.

### Interpreting Leo's Legislation

Dagron has criticized Leo's novels as 'simplistic' because he 'would not recognize a custom as legally valid or reasonable until it had passed through the filter of imperial thought'.<sup>74</sup> Dagron's assumption here is that the imperial thought is unnecessary, or indeed, unqualified to judge the validity of a law. However, Dagron's own work on the stature of the emperor as a unique kind of priest, one that rules as the image and earthly representation of God, reveals the consistency of Leo's thinking. It is not 'simplistic' for the Orthodox Christian emperor to involve himself so intimately in legislation, particularly because in so doing, the emperor fulfils his telic function. Leo is firmly in the tradition of Byzantine Christian rulers when he arbitrates on matters of law and justice, following Constantine's well-known dictum that the emperor is sovereign over the external affairs of the Church. This did not refer to doctrine, which was reserved for the clergy at councils (called by the emperor) but rather to what one might call practical theology – the outworking of conciliar decisions in the life of those belonging to Christ, that is, the citizens of the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

Whether Leo's vision of a Byzantine Christian society shaped by these laws eventually became a reality is difficult to discern. Although Leo does present an explicit vision of how the Christian *oikoumene* was to be legally governed, his ideas – at least, in this collection of novels – are far from comprehensive. However, this study reveals an emperor eager to impose his religious understanding of *eutaxia* in the communal and private lives of the Byzantine citizenry, which he claims as a proper activity for an emperor thought to uphold the Solomonic ideal of wisdom in his own lifetime.

### The Solomonic Ideal of Imperial Wisdom

The Solomonic ideal of a just ruler was embraced in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>75</sup> Solomon's seal – by which the Israelite king was said to control demons, effect healings, and practise magic – was in the shape of a star; it appeared on Umayyad coinage and in illustrated manuscripts, and was believed to have been given to Solomon by God via the Archangel Michael, according to the fourth-century apocryphal work known as

<sup>74</sup> Dagron, 'Lawful Society', 44.

<sup>75</sup> For more on the role of Solomon in all three monotheistic religions, see Rachel Milstein (ed.), *King Solomon's Seal* (Jerusalem, 1995).

the *Testament of Solomon*.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, in the biblical worldview of the Hebrew scriptures, wisdom is closely allied with law-giving. The wisdom of Solomon, for example, was granted as a gift from God and is illustrated by his wisdom in adjudicating legal disputes.<sup>77</sup> Leo VI was called not only *basileus* and *autokrator* of the Romans, he was also known in his lifetime as Leo the Wise. Evidence for this is widespread across every genre from chronicles to poetic commentaries to hymns to court orations. Arethas, the archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, refers to Leo as both *sophos* and *theosophos*, indicating that his wisdom was related to Christian piety; Leo is described as a man of God endowed with divine wisdom.

It is not only his contemporaries who present Leo as paradigmatically wise. Leo himself took pains to present himself this way as well. His throne, described in the *De ceremoniis* as *solomonteios*, or ‘Solomonic’,<sup>78</sup> deliberately mimicked the throne described in 1 Kings 10:18–20.<sup>79</sup> This famous Byzantine throne, designed to move up and down to amaze diplomatic guests, was surrounded by *automata* – singing birds, roaring lions, other moving animals – and decorated with a golden plane tree and a golden organ.<sup>80</sup> Newly built under Leo VI, it is always described as having been decorated with lions, not only following the biblical description of the throne of Solomon, but also echoing the name of Leo (Λέων). It has been argued that ‘the throne was likely meant to emphasize the reflection of the wise emperor as the new Solomon, as the seat of the most perfect

<sup>76</sup> The standard critical edition of this text is still C. C. McCown (ed.), *The Testament of Solomon, edited from manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna, with Introduction*, Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 9 (Leipzig, 1922). A modern English translation by D. C. Duling can be found in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York, 1983, reprinted 2010), 960–87.

<sup>77</sup> Solomon asked for ‘a discerning heart to distinguish between right and wrong’ (1 Kings 3:9), which is essentially wisdom for administering justice.

<sup>78</sup> *De ceremoniis* 11.15; A. Moffatt and M. Tall (eds.) *Constantine Porphyrogennetos, The Book of Ceremonies*, Vols. 1–2 (Canberra, 2012), 566–7. G. Dagron, ‘Trônes pour un empereur’, in Anna Avramea, Angeliki Laiou and Euangelos Chrysos (eds.), *Βυζάντιο κράτος και κοινωνία, Μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη* [Byzantium: State and Society, in Memory of Nikos Oikonomides] (Athens, 2003), 179–203.

<sup>79</sup> ‘The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold. The throne had six steps, and the throne had a round top, and on each side of the seat were armrests and two lions standing beside the armrests, while twelve lions stood there, one on each end of a step on the six steps.’ (ESV)

<sup>80</sup> Allegra Iafrate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden, 2016), 70–1. Cf. Liudprand of Cremona’s tenth-century account of his diplomatic visit to the throne room before Constantine VII in 949 in the *Antapodosis, seu rerum per Europam gestarum*, and before Nikephoros II in 968, in the *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nicephorum Phocam*. See Paolo Squatriti (ed. and tr.), *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, DC, 2007).

of judges in what was probably the hall of justice.<sup>81</sup> The Great Hall of the Magnaura, where the Solomonic throne was set up, may have functioned as a court of justice, among other things, emphasizing the role of the ruler as a lawgiver, as well as a wise king. As such, this throne 'would therefore constitute the mirror of what the sovereign wanted it to represent, the impression it should have conveyed, the declared manifesto of his personal propaganda'.<sup>82</sup>

It has been argued that the Macedonian dynasty, in attributing wisdom to Leo, was presenting him as a new Solomon to the image of his father Basil I's David.<sup>83</sup> Most Byzantine emperors embraced the role of David, a military man whose kingship was based on victory in warfare as well as divine blessing.<sup>84</sup> Basil I drew the parallel based on his rise from obscurity (David the shepherd boy, Basil the stable boy), his accession to the throne after an unpopular king (Saul, Michael III), and the death of his first-born as an expiation for murder (Uriah, Michael III), leaving his second son to succeed him as 'the Wise' (Solomon, Leo).<sup>85</sup> In a parainetic text addressed to Leo from his father, Leo is exhorted as a prince 'being reared with wisdom, become a *philosophos* for us from this – fear God, for the beginning wisdom is fear of the Lord'.<sup>86</sup> Like Solomon, Leo was a lover not a fighter, and embraced the role of Solomon as equally biblical, equally powerful, and equally kingly. Indeed, in his own writing he adopts Solomonic language and makes biblical references.

When Leo quotes Solomon – the writer of Proverbs was conventionally believed to be Solomon – he is inhabiting his Solomonic persona as the wise man. Even beyond that, in the palace in Constantinople he sat on an elaborate throne referred to as the Throne of Solomon, and a tenth-century source claims that a table of Solomon was to be found in

<sup>81</sup> Iafrate, *The Wandering Throne*, 103.

<sup>82</sup> Iafrate, *The Wandering Throne*, 73.

<sup>83</sup> C. Jolivet-Lévy, 'L'image du pouvoir dans l'art byzantin à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne (867–1056)', *Byzantion* 57 (1987), 441–70. See also P. Magdalino, 'The Bath of Leo the Wise and the "Macedonian Renaissance" Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial and Ideology', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 97–118.

<sup>84</sup> A classic example is Leo's grandson, Basil II, as depicted on the frontispiece of his psalter in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice (Cod. Marc. gr. 17). A. Cutler, 'The Psalter of Basil II [part 2]', *Arte Veneta* 31 (1977), 9–15.

<sup>85</sup> On Basil's identification with David, see A. Markopoulos, 'Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 159–70. On Leo's identification with Solomon, see Tougher, 'The Wisdom of Leo VI', in *New Constantines*, 171–9.

<sup>86</sup> *Patrologia Graeca* 107, lvii. This phrasing alludes to Prov 9:10: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.'

the Hagia Sophia. Solomon of course was a paradigmatic ruler of ancient Israel, and in appropriating the same imagery, Leo emphasizes his divinely given wisdom and his fitness to rule over God's *oikoumene*, the empire of Greek-speaking Romans who worshipped the Orthodox Christian deity.

Leo's literary allusions as well as his epithet reinforce his fitness to write legislation for the chosen people of God, as the Byzantines viewed themselves. The [following chapter](#) more fully theorizes Leo's approach to legislation for the ideologically defined entity over which he ruled for 26 years.

*Imperial Sacrality in Action*

In the very first constitution of his *Novels*, Leo makes direct reference to the prototypical lawgiver of Byzantine history: Justinian (r. 527–65).<sup>1</sup> Justinian reformed the Roman legal code and promulgated it in four books: the *Codex* issued in 529 and again in 534; the *Digest*, a compilation of Roman legal opinions issued in 533; the *Institutes*, a summary of Gaius's second-century commentaries destined to become the textbooks for the law schools of Constantinople and Beirut, issued in 535; and the *Novellae*, later laws representing Justinian's revision and clarification of the earlier material.<sup>2</sup> The *Novellae* were considered by Leo VI to be imprudent because he thought they introduced contradictions and conflicts with the earlier, established legislation. In a certain sense, Leo makes a good point, because the *Novellae* were never officially issued as a compilation; they represented Justinian's ongoing attempts to resolve legal contradictions, making them controversial almost by definition. Justinian had announced in 529 via the *Codex* – a work compiled by the Roman *quaestor* Tribonian (d. 542) and a ten-man commission – that henceforth no other written legal code was valid. New laws (hence *Novellae*) were subsequently required and, according to Leo VI, inflicted injury by creating disorder and confusion.

More than four centuries later, Leo took it upon himself to correct this situation, declaring by his own imperial decree (δόγματι ἐγγράφῳ τῆς βασιλείας ἡμῶν) a new solution: the cleansing and reordering of the law.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5 discussed this new legislative agenda as one intended to preserve good laws, invalidate old ones, affirm contemporary customs as laws, and create entirely new laws necessary for the flourishing of a Christian polity.

<sup>1</sup> See Novel 1 of Leo's *Novellae*.

<sup>2</sup> A. Louth, 'Justinian and His Legacy (500–600)', in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008), 99–129, at 108.

<sup>3</sup> P. Noailles and A. Dain (eds.), *Les Novelles de Léon VI, le Sage* (Paris, 1944), 7, lines 14–15.



Leo's *Procheiros Nomos* (c.907), which describes the emperor's purpose and reasoning behind his legislative revision, provides biblical evidence for his theory of justice. As a composition dated to the last years of Leo's reign, it may provide a more mature reflection than the preface to the *Novels*, composed some decades earlier. These biblical citations are intended to support what Dieter Simon has identified as 'three unconnected, yet contiguous, thoughts: that justice is especially useful for the imperial subjects, that God can be honoured via impartial judging, and that it was God who imparted the law'.<sup>4</sup> He further describes this approach to legislation as 'Leo's lofty, abstract, and idealized world of law'.<sup>5</sup> However, this assessment is missing a serious consideration of the religious material, which is characteristically not abstract but firmly located in the realities of daily life. In fact, as this chapter will later show, the laws promulgated in the *Novels* are intensely practical and indeed, intended to apply to any Christian citizen making mundane decisions. In the end, Simon rightly states, 'Legislation as reflection, memory, and a call for a culture of justice characterize Leo VI's endeavors.'<sup>6</sup>

The culture of justice is seen by Leo VI as equivalent to clarifying legal boundaries so that they fit more closely to the lines of justice laid down by God in scripture as well as ecclesiastical canons. In the words of Dagron, Leo's novels epitomize 'legislating temporally and on the evolution of a living Christian society'.<sup>7</sup> Most citizens of that Christian society probably were not aware of specific laws or legislation until they encountered a situation governed by it, and most historians of Leo's reign generally do not pay much attention to his legislative activity. However, this legislation is important because laws frame the boundaries of daily life, and laws influenced by religious concerns frame it even more specifically for citizens of a Christian empire like Byzantium.

The Byzantine empire enjoyed a certain embarrassment of riches when it came to legislation, much of it inherited from the pagan Roman empire, first adapted for Christian rule by Justinian. Where Justinian sought to update the laws to suit a changed social perspective, that is to say, to make them more suitable for a populace more Christian than pagan, Leo more narrowly sought to clarify situations encountered by Christians in

<sup>4</sup> D. Simon, 'Legislation as Both a World Order and a Legal Order', in A. Laiou and D. Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 1–26, at 20.

<sup>5</sup> Simon, 'Legislation', 22.

<sup>6</sup> Simon, 'Legislation', 25.

<sup>7</sup> G. Dagron, 'Lawful Society and Legitimate Power', in A. Laiou and D. Simon (eds.), *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 42.

Byzantium by bringing the law into harmony with Orthodox convictions, most notably those articulated in the canons of the Council in Trullo of 692, while also citing older synodal decisions and conciliar canons.<sup>8</sup> To do this, he presented moral, rational, canonical, and sometimes biblical justifications for the novels he wrote. This was not simply a matter of giving lip service to religious belief, or invoking mere rhetoric in an effort to give a Christianized veneer to legislative changes. Dieter Simon has argued that ‘one cannot strip “rhetoric” – as if it were a shirt – from a text, even a technical legal text, in order to devote oneself to the facts’, a move that he calls ‘illusion’ and ‘linguistically untenable’.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this is just what this chapter is not intending to do. Rather, these religious rhetorical moves will be considered on their own terms, and investigated for resonances with earlier canon law and Orthodox theological positions.

A deeper look at Leo’s approach reveals that he decided which actions to choose based upon his own philosophy of law, informed by his particular religious sensibilities. Indeed, Leo announces in various places throughout the *Novellae* precisely why he is taking the decisions articulated in these imperial decrees. His motivations fall into four categories:

1. A desire to preserve or follow the ecclesiastical decrees of the church, especially the Council in Trullo.
2. Guidelines set by scripture or divine precepts as Leo understands them.
3. Leo’s own ideas about the definition of justice, that is, what is advantageous to his own subjects.<sup>10</sup> These include:
  - a. The principles of equity and proportionality.
  - b. The principles of order and clarity.
4. Human reason.

<sup>8</sup> Leo sometimes refers to this as the Sixth Council; since the Fifth (553 CE) and Sixth (681 CE) Ecumenical Councils wrote no canons, but only anathemas, the Council in Trullo or Penthekte Synodos (known in the West as the Quinisext Council) was called by Justinian II in 692 CE to complete the work of the previous two councils, resulting in the canon law to which Leo refers, also known in the *Pedalion* as the 102 Canons. The *Pedalion* is a later compilation of canon law applicable in the Eastern Church. It was first published in 1800, and the first English translation was published in 1908 by D. Cummings. The most recent version of Cummings’s English translation is the 1983 (New York) reprint of the 1957 Chicago edition. For a detailed analysis of the 35 novels of Leo with direct ecclesiastical focus, see the useful contribution that traces the link between Leo’s legislation and the ecclesiastical canons by S. N. Troianos, ‘Οι “εκκλησιαστικὲς” Νεαρές του Λέοντος ζ’ και οι πηγές τους’, in Troianos, *Οι νεαρές Λέοντος ζ’ του σόφου. Προλεγόμενα, κείμενο, απόδοση στη νεοελληνική και επίμετρο* (Athens, 2007), 445–67. An earlier version of this material appeared in German: ‘Zauberei und Giftmischerei in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit’, in G. Prinzing and D. Simon (eds.), *Fest und Alltag in Byzanz* (Munich, 1990), 37–51.

<sup>9</sup> Simon, ‘Legislation’, 2–3.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Novel 19.

Each of these will be examined in turn, and Leo's comments and philosophy thereby demonstrated through his own words from the *Novels*.

### Preservation of Ecclesiastical Decrees

Of the 113 novels in Leo's corpus, 25 of them reflect concerns addressed by ecclesiastical canons.<sup>11</sup> Novel 3 refers to the ancient regulations of the church, while Novel 35 calls it the 'ecclesiastical law'. Five novels (6, 15, 73, 74, and 75) refer directly to the Sixth Council (Trullo), while other novels mention the laws of God (51, 98), the divine precepts (83, 97), divine retribution (60), various ecclesiastical laws (76), a decree of the holy apostles (86), a precept of the divine apostles (87), holy law and decree of the Holy Spirit (90), divine law (90, 97, 111), canon law (96), or the divine command/command of God (97).

Leo affirms canon law that applies to deeply personal life events like having children, getting married, taking monastic vows, and having sex. For example, against the custom of his day but in accordance with Canon 6 of Trullo, Leo declares that marriage after taking priestly vows is illegal (Novel 3), but having legitimate children is not (Novel 2). He affirms the age of ten as the minimum for admittance into a monastic order (Novel 6), and the age of twenty for becoming a subdeacon (Novel 16).<sup>12</sup>

He also makes canon law into civil law in Novel 8, which combines Leo's respect for ecclesiastical decision, his concern for good military order, and his willingness to change civil law when he disagrees with it. Novel 8 cancels Justinian's Novel 123, which forces a runaway monk to be compelled to join his local theme army after a second offence. Leo sees this as somewhat ridiculous, asking whether a monk who runs away ought not to be returned to his monastery even the first time. In Leo's view, such a man certainly does not belong in the military. Therefore Leo elevates Canon 7 of Chalcedon to civil law, which states: 'those who have once been enrolled among the clergy, or have been made monks, shall accept neither a military charge nor any secular dignity; and if they shall presume to do so and not repent in such wise as to turn again to that which they had first chosen for the love of God, they shall be anathematized.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Novels 2–4, 6–9, 15, 16, 24, 35, 54, 58, 60, 73–6, 83, 86–8, 90, 91, 93 refer to canons explicitly. Several more novels make less explicit mention of divine laws or precepts. Troianos lists 35 novels in this category, including those novels that he identifies as implicitly interacting with canonical precedents without direct reference to them. Troianos, *Oi veapés Léontos*, 446.

<sup>12</sup> Novel 16 affirmed Canon 15 of Trullo, in opposition to civil law setting the minimum age for a subdeacon at 25. This novel is reduplicated in Novel 75.

<sup>13</sup> ET from P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1955), 14: 272.

Leo also weighs in on the punishment for rape, affirming the penalties stated in his father's *Basilika* (60.58) as well as by long-established conciliar decrees; these declared that a rapist be anathematized (if laity) or defrocked (if clergy).<sup>14</sup> Leo makes much of the affirmation of his father's law, claiming that the former penalty of death was too strict. The French editors of the *Novellae* find in the text of this novel some literary artifice, since they see no tension between the civil and ecclesiastical laws on this subject.<sup>15</sup> They are likely right; Leo does seem here to be taking advantage of an opportunity to trumpet the achievement of his father without making any new change in the civil law. One wonders why he thought it necessary to include this in his collection of novels. His only justification is that he considered the church canons too mild and the civil legislation too severe, because the latter included punishment for the girl's father, if he knew of the rape and did not react appropriately. Leo also approved of Basil I's change to the civil law, which introduced the question of whether a weapon was used. Basil ruled that if a rape was committed under force of a lethal weapon, the rapist should suffer death and his accomplices punished by rhinotomy, whipping, and tonsure. If the rape was committed without weapons, the death penalty was commuted to amputation of a hand, with accomplices punished by whipping, tonsure, and exile.

Moreover, Leo explicitly states in Novel 9 that he wants to enforce ecclesiastical discipline, which means of course the 'sacred canons' (τοῖς ἱεροῖς ... κανόσι).<sup>16</sup> Novels 9, 10, and 11 are cited by later Byzantine canonists – like Balsamon, Harmenopoulos, and Blastares – as a group because they deal with related subjects.<sup>17</sup> Novels 2–17 are addressed to the patriarch of Constantinople, which may also account for the appeal to ecclesiastical discipline and canon law.

### Scriptural Guidelines

Oddly, Leo cites scripture in only three of his 113 novels: two concern marriage (Novels 31 and 91) and one concerns food (Novel 58). Novel 31 adds to one of Justinian's novels on divorce (Novel 117.8) permitting a

<sup>14</sup> Novel 35. These penalties were established in Canon 67 of the Apostolic Canons, Canon 27 of Chalcedon (not Canon 37 as erroneously noted in Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, p 140, n.3), and Canon 92 of Trullo.

<sup>15</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 140, n. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 43, line 6.

<sup>17</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 42, n.1.

new justification for divorce not mentioned in any previous law code: If a woman has an abortion, her husband may lawfully divorce her. In this novel, Leo refers directly to the creation story of Genesis, whereby human beings are created by God – the man from clay, and the woman from the man.<sup>18</sup> Leo takes this to mean that a wife should always be on the same side as her husband, working towards the same goals because she is made of the same substance, and thus, in the biblical view, they are one flesh (σάρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός).<sup>19</sup>

In Novel 91, where Leo makes it illegal to keep a concubine, he employs a metaphor from the biblical book of Proverbs comparing a wife to a spring of water. He rhetorically asks whether a person with access to a pure spring ought to prefer a muddied one (ὁ βόρβορος).<sup>20</sup> The assumption here seems to be that a married man ought not to keep a concubine, which may provide some insight into Leo's own decision as a widower to keep one later in life. His own legislation left a sort of loophole for his own decision to keep Zoe Karbonopsina after the death of his third wife.

In Novel 58, which forbids eating blood, Leo invokes the law of Moses as well as canon law. Although he does not make explicit references, the biblical injunction is indeed in the Hebrew scriptures, from the Torah, which is traditionally believed to have been written by Moses.<sup>21</sup> He also invokes an unspecified law from the apostles, which is likely a reference to the New Testament book of Acts, where the apostles reiterate the Mosaic law and send a letter to the churches informing them that the injunction against eating blood remains valid.<sup>22</sup> Leo's particular interest in this law appears to be based therefore on scriptural regulations set down in multiple places. His disgust with the practice is evident because he considers anyone who does this to be acting from either greed or gluttony (οἱ μὲν κέρδους ἕνεκα, οἱ δὲ τό γαστριμάργον).<sup>23</sup> Leo finds this behaviour so culpable that he increases the penalty far beyond the biblical one. He decrees that anyone who eats or indeed sells such food shall not only suffer exile for life, but even before this shall have his property confiscated, be severely beaten,

<sup>18</sup> See Gen 2:21–25. Leo uses the same language as that found in this passage of the LXX.

<sup>19</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 125, line 3. Cf. Gen 2:23; Eph 5:28–31.

<sup>20</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301, lines 8–9.

<sup>21</sup> Lev 7:25–26 proscribes the eating of the blood of any bird or animal under penalty of exile. The injunction is repeated three more times in a similar passage in Lev 17:10–15, along with the rationale for the law: blood contains life, and it is blood on the altar that makes atonement. As an element of sacrifice therefore it is to be given only to God, not to human beings.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 15:20–29. This law is codified by the church in the ecclesiastical canons as well.

<sup>23</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 219, lines 4–5.

and be shaved to the skin to indicate visibly his disgrace (ἐν χρῶ̄ κουρείῳ ἀτιμασθῆναι).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, any magistrate who fails to uphold this law shall owe a fine of ten pounds of gold, or the equivalent of several years' salary. The heavy penalty thus demonstrates Leo's priority for the citizens of his empire to live in accordance with ecclesiastical principles, or suffer an extreme and visible punishment for disobeying what he calls the divine commandment (τοῦ θείου ἐντάλματος).<sup>25</sup>

### Leo's Definition of Justice

Leo declares in the prolegomenon to Novel 19 that he is motivated by a desire to abolish what is useless for the citizens of his empire. Indeed, in Leo's view, the laws are the eyes of government and therefore a legal system marked by justice is essential to good governance.<sup>26</sup> So what? What does Leo mean by 'useless' (ἄσύμφορος)? In the case of Novel 19 it means inequity; Novel 19 decrees that inheritance laws must be equitable, that is, that all children should receive the same percentage of their father's estate, regardless of the father's wishes. Leo here codifies his own conviction that parents ought to have no favourites among their children, but treat each of them equally. Leo often uses the language of equality (ἴσος, ἰσονομία) when revealing his theory of justice. In Novel 19, he declares it to be irrational to prefer a lie over the truth.<sup>27</sup> This shows his conviction that laws should be equitable, rational, and useful.<sup>28</sup>

The prolegomenon to Novel 54 mentions this idea of usefulness in the context of an observation. Leo says here that those who seek to promulgate useful (σύμφορος) laws deserve praise for thus demonstrating tender love (φιλοστοργία) for their subjects.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, such lawgivers deserve honour because they literally engrave these laws with the help of the divine spirit (ὅτι καὶ θεῖῳ ἐχάραξαν τὰ δόγματα πνεύματι).<sup>30</sup> His notion of justice is thus closely tied to benefiting citizens and also to divine inspiration, as well as a high value of truth, as shown in Novel 19.

<sup>24</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 219, lines 19–20.

<sup>25</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 219, lines 16–17.

<sup>26</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 73, lines 19–25.

<sup>27</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 75, line 25.

<sup>28</sup> Leo's legislation was treated as valid civil law in Greece from 1835 until 1946. S. N. Troianos, 'Die Novellen Leons VI', in *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I*, Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte Athener Reihe 10 (Athens, 1997), 141–54, at 154.

<sup>29</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 205, lines 18–21.

<sup>30</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 207, lines 6–7.

### The Principle of Proportionality

Part of his definition of justice includes the idea that laws should avoid extremes. In other words, penalties should be proportional to the destruction wrought by the illegal action. For example, in Novel 13, Leo considers certain rents charged by owners of church buildings (like orphanages and hospitals) to be extortionate, and therefore cruel, and thus to be forbidden in a just society. He rules that rents must not be more than what is stated in the rental agreement, and that landlords may not make changes that benefit only themselves.

Leo states in the prolegomenon to Novel 59, which repeals a law that allowed free men to sell themselves into slavery, that such laws do not deserve respect, because they allow injury to citizens. Certainly selling oneself into slavery cannot bring benefit; indeed, Leo considers such a course of action to be extreme and proof that the free man is demented (ὀφθείη δυστυκῶν εἰς φρένας).<sup>31</sup> Leo compares law and citizenry to father and children, and thus deems laws that bring injury to be tantamount to abuse. Similarly, in Novel 61, which details penalties for tax collectors who abuse their authority, Leo presents his view that former laws were not in proportion to this behaviour, because they prescribed the death penalty. In other words, he says, the penalty should be proportional to the crime, and the death penalty is an excessively severe punishment for theft. He repeats this conviction again in Novel 62, where he repeals the death penalty for those who sell public property, deeming this a sort of injustice itself because it is disproportionately severe.

Even more complex with regard to the principle of proportionality, are Leo's comments in Novel 60, on the punishment for those who castrate others. The fate of castrated men is something Leo regards with some horror, because body parts are given by God, and the removal of such creates mutilated beings entirely different from what they were before. Leo does not appear to have much patience for this act even when motivated by religious custom. In such cases, castrating a castrator might seem proportional, but Leo recoils because it constitutes a rejection of the creation of God. Thus, Leo forbids the *lex talionis* for perpetrators of this crime, although in some measure he admits it might be considered appropriate. Rather, he decrees confiscation of property and exile for ten years for anyone who permits himself to be castrated. For those who enact the castration, he decrees the same in addition to a physical beating. The only

<sup>31</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 223, line 1.

exception Leo envisions to these penalties is when a man has taken this step in search of improved health, a motivation that Leo finds faultless. This novel shows that Leo tends to use his understanding of Christian theology to temper his approach to justice; practically speaking, proportionality is a high value, but not an absolute one for Leo.

He is even more explicit in Novel 61, which lowers the penalty for tax collectors who abuse their office, and in Novel 67, which lowers the penalty for a deserter who returns home. Leo here presents his rationale for lifting the death penalty in both cases. In the prolegomenon to Novel 61, he states clearly that a legal penalty in proportion to the violation is just, but if a penalty is disproportionate to a crime, this is not justice but rather injustice that is perpetrated by the law (οὐκέτι δίκης ἔργον, ἀδικίας δὲ μᾶλλον).<sup>32</sup> In the prolegomenon to Novel 67, he waxes almost eloquent on the responsibilities of a ruler, whether of a household or an empire, to exercise authority neither too severely nor too leniently, for to rule otherwise would be to do injustice (ἀδικία).<sup>33</sup> This principle is repeated in Novels 62, 64, and 66. Although not an absolute rule, proportionality is still shown to be integral to Leo's conception of justice.

### Order and Clarity

Another aspect of justice, according to Leo, includes greater clarity in the legal code, because this is necessary to ensure an orderly communal life. His approach here involves two principles: language that is so clear it cannot be misunderstood or misinterpreted, and coherence between the civil and ecclesiastical law. Thus he invests his effort of cleansing the law into creating a civil code as congruent as possible with church regulations, without contradiction or obfuscation. According to Leo, such a move is necessary for a Christian polity to be fully in line with the decrees of the deity. Conflict between ecclesiastical canons and civil laws must thus be reconciled.

In Novel 6, Leo acknowledges a discrepancy between a canon of Basil the Great and one of the Council in Trullo: the former declares that a young man may not become a monk before the age of 16 or 17, while the latter reduces the eligible age to 10. Not wishing to contradict either the venerable Basil or the wisdom of the Council fathers, Leo finds a way to reconcile these by introducing the complicating factor of how a new

<sup>32</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 229, lines 2–3.

<sup>33</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 245, lines 13–14.



monk should dispose of his property. For a boy of ten, Leo grants no such authority, while preserving his agreement with Basil in making the assumption that Basil chose the older age for exactly this purpose, that is, so that a new monk would be old enough to dispose of his own property before taking vows. In this way he neatly avoids gainsaying one of Christianity's most influential fathers and yet maintains the ruling of the conciliar Church at the same time.

Leo addresses another complicated discrepancy in Novel 35, on the penalties for rapists. Here he manages to trump the Byzantine disinclination for innovation in another way, not by resolving the differences himself, but by adopting his father's ruling. In this way, Leo can be seen to be respecting his father as well as previous legislation (i.e. that written by Basil I) without disrespecting the ecclesiastical law, which he says was too mild, or the former civil laws, which he says were too harsh. Leo is unafraid to criticize previous law, particularly civil law, as evidenced in his remarks in Novel 24. This novel privileges church rules over civil law by disallowing marriages between adopted and natural children in the same family, on the grounds that the adoption ceremony bestows new names as part of a sacred initiation (διὰ τελετῆς ἱερᾶς).<sup>34</sup> In such cases, Leo says, one cannot change one's relationship to an adoptive father.

In the prolegomenon to Novel 77, Leo addresses this principle definitively, if delicately, stating that obscurity in legislation is not without reproach (οὐκ ἀνέγκλητον ἢ ἀσάφεια).<sup>35</sup> He goes on to say that laws should not be mysterious, but rather easily comprehensible, so that living under such laws can be profitable (λυσίτελεία)<sup>36</sup> for everyone. The rest of the novel is dedicated to clarifying the penalty for forgery.

### Human Reason

Given Leo's penchant for privileging the decrees of the church or the views of theology over mere secular law, one might find it surprising to discover that he also refers several times to human reason as a valid form of adjudicating truth or justice. In Novel 21, for example, he appeals to the classic model of justice as a balance scale. He assumes that his audience will agree with him that where a balance scale is designed to create equilibrium, laws that do not digress from what is right will uphold justice. Novel 21 goes

<sup>34</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 95, lines 5 and 17.

<sup>35</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 269, lines 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 269, line 10.

on to rule that dowries must be paid on the principle of fairness, neither requiring a wealthy parent to pay all of it, nor permitting a wealthy son not to pay any of it; the novel requires that such donations be paid equitably from both parent and child regardless of relative wealth. This law thus appeals to human reason without any reference to divine decrees, scripture, or ecclesiastical canons.

Similarly, there are occasions when an appeal to divine law or scriptural precedent yields no fruit, and in these cases Leo appeals to what seems most reasonable to him. He claims that these grounds are based in what qualifies as good government, but what he means is logic. For example, in setting into place a law for adjudicating business disputes in Novel 103, Leo relies on human reason to determine the percentage of profits for owners of sea-front property. That is, he decides that in the matter of stretching nets for fishing, owners of the seafront properties shall share in the profits equally, because the size of the properties does not matter so much as the possibility of stretching the nets from them. Similarly, in Novel 105 establishing penalties for corrupt judges, Leo does not appeal to canon law or scripture, but rather uses two metaphors that appeal to human reason: fatherhood and medicine. He says that laws are like good parents: moderate, not severe, in administering punishment. They are also like physicians, which do not seek to harm the body, but only to cure it. Therefore, Leo determines that the death penalty for corruption is extremely severe and therefore not humane (φιλόανθρωπος).<sup>37</sup>

Likewise in at least ten other novels, Leo refrains from any appeal to divine principles or ideological commitments. His primary frame of reference appears to be what he himself finds reasonable or useful for the populace, and in this, he asserts his authority as a new Solomon, a man wise enough to make legislative decisions without the need for precedence or divine approval.

### Leo's View of Marriage

Because Leo VI is widely known as having scandalously married a fourth time, an examination of his perspective on laws governing marriage may illuminate his justification for breaking even his own civil laws in this regard. His novels deal with who may marry whom (23, 24, 30, 33, 98), how one may contract or break a betrothal (18, 100, 101, 109), legal grounds for divorce (31, 93, 111, 112), inheritance rights for surviving

<sup>37</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 345, line 24.

spouses (20, 22, 110), marriage rituals (89), and most illuminating, the penalty for contracting a third marriage (90). Throughout his legislation, even in novels not dealing specifically with marriage law, Leo indulges in explanations to justify his rulings. For example, Novel 26, which permits eunuchs to adopt children, describes marriage as the greatest gift one may receive from God, primarily because it permits the propagation of the human race. Indeed, Leo rhetorically asks whether there is any joy so great as the birth of children. He adds that the comfort of children is rather useful for relieving the annoyances of age; one hardly need add that this represents quite an assumption about the role of children as caretakers of their parents! In any case, because children are one of the primary purposes of marriage in Leo's view, he considers that all people should enjoy this benefit, including eunuchs, the unmarried, the infertile, and parents whose children have predeceased them. What is most interesting about this is that Leo compares childlessness to a sort of disability. He says that those who cannot speak have recourse to writing in order to make themselves understood, therefore, by parity of reasoning, those who have no children should not be forbidden to obtain them. Given Leo's desire for a male heir, and the extraordinary measures he took to have his only surviving son declared properly legitimate, one wonders whether he himself felt handicapped by his lack of (male) offspring.<sup>38</sup>

Despite his uncanonical third and fourth marriages, Leo expresses a high view of the status of marriage in Novel 89, a new law requiring that marriage be ritually solemnized by the bestowal of the nuptial benediction. Previous laws did not require this, an omission that Leo finds regrettable. Indeed, if a marriage takes place without prayer and religious rites, Leo questions the validity of the marriage. In his view, there is nothing between celibacy and marriage that is virtuous (ἀκαταγόρητος).<sup>39</sup> Leo concludes the novel with rhetorical questions that effectively demand that his subjects choose between marriage or celibacy, because cohabitation is not a choice with integrity, according to him. This devotion to the religious sanction for marriage may provide some insight into why Leo thought it necessary to marry a fourth time in spite of his own civil law.

<sup>38</sup> Leo's first son, Basil, born to his third wife Eudokia Baiana, died shortly after his birth in 901 (*Vita Euthymii*, 63.13–14; ed. P. Karlin-Hayter (Brussels, 1970)), but Leo did have one daughter, Anna. See W. Ohnsorge, 'Zur Frage der Töchter Kaiser Leons VI', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 51 (1958), 78–81.

<sup>39</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 297, line 7.

In Novel 91, Leo appeals not only to canon law but also to scripture to justify cancelling Justinian's law permitting a man to keep a concubine.<sup>40</sup> This is poignant, because as all historians of middle Byzantium know, Leo kept Zoe Karbonopsina, the mother of Constantine VII, as a concubine before marrying her in defiance of the patriarch, canon law, and his own civil legislation. Given his conviction that children (it goes without saying male children especially) are a blessing from God that brings comfort to one's old age, as well as his high view of marriage, then one quite understands the internal pressure he may have felt to marry Zoe Karbonopsina. It is quite possible that Leo felt himself obligated to marry Zoe out of his desire to honour the institution of marriage. Although some might see his decision to marry Zoe as evidence of a romantic heart, it seems much more likely to have been the result of religious guilt based on his own personal and also public convictions about the value of marriage in a Christian society. On some level, this hot-tempered yet determined man could not escape his religious formation; he could not resist the dual inducements of a legitimate son and a legitimate marriage.

Leo VI must have written Novel 91 well before he decided to keep Zoe Karbonopsina as a concubine, because he refers to the Justinianic law as an egregious error (διαμαρτία) and an outrage (ὑβρις) unworthy of a Christian polity.<sup>41</sup> This strong language reveals a pious emperor in full flow as he criticizes such behaviour as offensive not only to Christian faith, but also to nature (οὐ μόνον τῆς πίστεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς φύσεως).<sup>42</sup> In the next sentence he marshals scriptural support for his position, remarking that one ought to drink from a spring rather than a muddied pool. The scripture he uses here comes from Proverbs 5, which refers explicitly to a wife as a pure and private spring.<sup>43</sup> Leo goes on to remonstrate with those who keep concubines, saying that one should not use what is forbidden, and in any case, Leo believes, despite perhaps his own experience to the contrary, it is not difficult to find a companion for life (οὐ χαλεπὸν δὲ τὴν κοινωνὸν τοῦ βίου εὐρεῖν).<sup>44</sup> In hindsight, this novel is unfortunately redolent of imperial hypocrisy, bringing into question Leo's personal integrity despite his reputation as a Solomonic emperor divinely gifted with wisdom.

<sup>40</sup> He refers to Prov 5:15–18 as well as Canon 86 of Trullo, Canon 4 of Gregory of Nyssa, and Canon 59 of Basil of Caesarea.

<sup>41</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301, lines 3 and 6. Leo refers to Justinian's *Digest* 25.7.

<sup>42</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301, line 6.

<sup>43</sup> 'Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.' (Prov 5:15–18, ESV)

<sup>44</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 301.

In fact his third and fourth marriages were scandalous for the church and also the empire, because the ecclesiastical canons governing subsequent marriages were ancient, well known, and strict. Leo's Novel 90, which stipulates that those who contract third marriages shall incur the penalty of the canons, also makes clear that the civil law in this regard was too lenient; Leo was in fact strengthening the penalties for such a dastardly action. The applicable canons date to the fourth century: Basil of Caesarea (d.379) and the councils of Neocaesarea (315 CE), Laodicea (364 CE), Nicaea (325 CE), and Ancyra (314 CE). They are remarkably consistent in terms of describing the Christian standard for serial marriage, namely, that it required penance for a year or two (for a second marriage) and five years (for a third marriage). Basil declared that a third marriage was a greater sin than fornication.<sup>45</sup> This might seem counterintuitive, since one might be tempted to think that marriage is better than the disobedience of unchastity, but Basil is clear about the hierarchy, prescribing elsewhere that seclusion and prayer for a period of five years is an appropriate penance for a third marriage.<sup>46</sup> He leaves the door open, stating also that although disgraceful, a third marriage is not condemned.<sup>47</sup> In this, Basil follows earlier conciliar canons that decree a similar penance.<sup>48</sup>

As an educated prince, tutored by the patriarch of Constantinople, Leo VI was certainly aware of these canons, and indeed, refers to them generally as the 'will of the Holy Spirit' or the 'decrees of the Holy Spirit' in Novel 90. The whole impact of his novel is to give precedence to the canon law because it is from God and therefore more valid than mere civil law. Leo declares that the penalty for a third marriage is therefore to be in conformity with the holy canon. Furthermore, there is evidence that he interpolated legislation forbidding fourth marriages into the *Procheiros Nomos* of his father Basil I.<sup>49</sup>

It appears that Leo was something of a hypocrite when it came to his own obedience to the law. Leo's first wife, the sainted Theophano, died in 893 or possibly, according to the *Vita Euthymii*, in November 897, of illness brought on by her asceticism.<sup>50</sup> Leo had carried on a liaison with Zoe

<sup>45</sup> Basil of Caesarea, Canon 80.

<sup>46</sup> Basil of Caesarea, Canon 4.

<sup>47</sup> Basil of Caesarea, Canon 50.

<sup>48</sup> Canon 3 of Neocaesarea (one year for a second marriage, five years for a third); Canon 1 of Laodicea ('a short time of prayer' for a second marriage); Canon 8 of Nicaea (an unstipulated penance); Canon 19 of Ancyra (one year of seclusion).

<sup>49</sup> N. Oikonomides, 'Leo VI's Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages: An Interpolation in the *Procheiros Nomos* (IV, 25–27)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 173–93.

<sup>50</sup> The ninth-century *Vita Euthymii* gives 10 November 893 as Theophano's date of death. However, the late tenth-century Symeon Metaphrastes indicates 897. On the manner of her death, see the *Vita*

Zaoutzaina for years, even before his marriage to Theophano, and wanted to remarry immediately. However, Zoe's bad reputation had made her notorious, so he delayed, but not very much.<sup>51</sup> In the end, he married her in July 898,<sup>52</sup> less than a year after Theophano's death and against the recommendation of his spiritual father Euthymios.<sup>53</sup> It was a short marriage; she died in the winter of 899–900 after an illness.<sup>54</sup> Only one daughter survived from this marriage, Anna.<sup>55</sup>

Against his own civil law and the aforementioned ecclesiastical canons, however, Leo decided to marry a third time in the spring of 900 to the mysterious Eudokia Baiana. Curiously, there was no public outcry.<sup>56</sup> Eudokia gave birth to a boy, Basil, in April of 901, but neither the baby nor his mother survived long after.

By 903, he had taken Zoe Karbonopsina as a lover, but did not marry her until 906, after the birth and baptism of their son, Constantine VII in September of 905.<sup>57</sup> It seems clear that Leo did attempt to follow canon law in waiting five years between his third and fourth marriages. However, this was the first time any Byzantine emperor had married a fourth time, and it was to remain a lasting stain on Leo's legacy.

*Theophano* in E. Kurtz, 'Zwei griechischen Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI', *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale de St.-Petersbourg* (St Petersburg, 1898), 3: 1–24. See also G. Downey, 'The Church of All Saints (Church of St. Theophano) near the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9–10 (1956), 301–5. For more on Symeon, see C. Högel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization* (Copenhagen, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> See S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 140–6.

<sup>52</sup> P. Karlin-Hayter, 'La mort de Théophano (10.11.896 ou 895)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 62 (1969): 13–18, at 13.

<sup>53</sup> *Vita Euthymii*, 47.4–30.

<sup>54</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, v1.13, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838).

<sup>55</sup> According to long-standing Byzantine custom, Anna was betrothed to a Western prince, Louis of Provence. She died in 906.

<sup>56</sup> Observed by Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii, Commentary*, 183.

<sup>57</sup> R. J. H. Jenkins, 'The Chronological Accuracy of the "Logothete" for the years AD 867–913', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965), 91–112.

*Leo VI as Homilist*

Leo's imperial sacrality can be observed subtly in his military manual and more overtly in his legislation, but it is perhaps clearest in the most ideological genre of writing he produced: his homilies. Indeed, it has been observed that 'the traditional divisions of Byzantine literature into the high style and the vernacular or into secular and ecclesiastical ... has led to the partition of literature to such an extent that we lack a complete picture of the author, who felt free to cultivate his interests in various literary genres.'<sup>1</sup> A brief examination of his homiletic corpus may help to draw a fuller picture of Leo VI as an author.

The difficulties of the genre, particularly with regard to nomenclature, make even a brief study of Leo's homilies more challenging and somewhat problematic. Although very good scientific bibliographies have been accurately compiled, Byzantinists have so far not examined Byzantine homiletical writings as a unified genre. As Antonopoulou has pointed out, Albert Ehrhard in Krumbacher's history of Byzantine literature listed homilies as 'ecclesiastical rhetoric', and only included those authors who wrote primarily or solely homilies.<sup>2</sup> This decision effectively excluded homilies written by non-theological figures like Leo VI. Similarly, in Beck's two-volume work on theological Byzantine literature, most homilies are found classified under 'Preachers' but are also listed in the works of other writers.<sup>3</sup> As Antonopoulou observes, not only is this confusing, but the result is that 'a complete picture of the development of Byzantine homiletics cannot be

<sup>1</sup> T. Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics: An Introduction to the Field and its Study', in *A Catalogue of Byzantine Manuscripts in their Liturgical Context: Challenges and Perspectives: Collected Papers resulting from the expert meeting of the Catalogue of Byzantine Manuscripts programme held at the PThU in Kampen, the Netherlands on 6th–7th November 2009* (Turnhout, 2013), 187.

<sup>2</sup> K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)* (Munich, 1897), 163. Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics', 183.

<sup>3</sup> H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 369–798.

established.<sup>4</sup> This makes it more delicate to place Leo VI's works securely within an embryonic scholarly framework.

Another scholarly gap in the study of Byzantine homiletics involves the lack of a universal definition of what constitutes a homily. Antonopoulou has pointed out that these public speeches are generally classified under rhetoric – encomia, festal sermons, panegyric, and other types of homilies tend to follow the rules of Roman imperial rhetoric – but some scholars prefer to use the modern term homiletics, because it more specifically refers to the sermons that interpret biblical passages.<sup>5</sup> This can lead to confusion for non-Byzantinists seeking to understand the difference between a Byzantine homily understood as exegesis and a Byzantine homily composed for a one-time event, like Leo's speech on the occasion of his brother's elevation to the patriarchate. Nonetheless, one might make an argument, however puzzling to the uninitiated, in favour of using the terms 'rhetoric' and 'homily' interchangeably for the medieval Byzantine period, because of the ideological character of the medieval Byzantine *oikoumene*.<sup>6</sup>

These compositions are rare for Byzantine emperors, thus Leo's output in this regard makes him unusual for his manifest interest in homiletical writing.<sup>7</sup> Across the millennium of Byzantium's existence, only three other emperors produced what one might call homiletical writings: Constantine I (r. 306–37 CE), Leo's son Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 945–59), and Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391–1425).<sup>8</sup> The authorship of Constantine the Great has been questioned by scholars of his reign, primarily because of disagreement over whether he genuinely converted to Christianity from paganism; many have wondered whether a deathbed baptism constitutes genuine conversion. Leo's son did not write what modern scholars would define as homilies, although his speeches to the military excavate biblical exegesis as it was employed to serve political goals,<sup>9</sup> while the sermon

<sup>4</sup> Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics', 184.

<sup>5</sup> Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics', 184.

<sup>6</sup> P. Triepelias, *Ὁμιλιτική. Ἡ ἱστορία καὶ θεωρία τοῦ κηρύγματος* (Athens, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent survey of current scholarship on Byzantine homilies, including desiderata and substantial bibliography, see Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics', 183–98.

<sup>8</sup> The first from Constantine the Great, delivered in Latin on Good Friday in the city of Sredets (modern Sofia, Bulgaria): see Mark Edwards (tr.), *Constantine and Christendom: The Oration to the Saints; The Greek and Latin Accounts of the Discovery of the Cross; the Edict of Constantine to Pope Silvester*, Translated Texts for Historians 39 (Liverpool, 2003). The second from Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos on the translation of the *acheiropoietos* icon of the mandylion: M. L. D. Riedel, 'Demonic Prophecy as Byzantine Imperial Propaganda: The Rhetorical Appeal of the Tenth-Century *Narratio de Imagine Edessena*', *Fides et Historia* 49.1 (2017): 11–23. The third from Manuel II Palaiologos: *Funerale Oration on His Brother Theodore*, ed. J. Chrysostomides (Thessaloniki: 1985).

<sup>9</sup> H. Ahrweiler, 'Un discours inédit de Constantin VII Porphyrogénète', *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), 393–404. R. Vári, 'Zum historischen exzerptenwerke des Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos',



commemorating the translation of the Mandylion to Constantinople is attributed to him, and has been included in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* for 16 August.<sup>10</sup> The later writing from Manuel II was a funeral oration, and therefore constitutes what one might call rhetoric rather than a homily, although one of Leo VI's homilies, also a eulogy, is included in his corpus of homiletical writings. The relevant point here is that although three other emperors wrote or may have written works that might be classified as homilies, Leo VI remains the only one to produce a corpus of more than three dozen; this unusual literary effort is unprecedented and remains unique among Byzantine rulers.

Despite Leo's religious education, this pronounced determination to write hortatory material for the church remains therefore somewhat surprising, unless one grasps the need for a non-campaigning ruler to demonstrate his leadership and authority. Constantine I and Manuel II both were successful military leaders, but Leo was not, therefore he employed a different prestige activity available to him: exercising ecclesiastical authority via homilies. Notably, his son Constantine VII also never led troops on campaign and resorted to the same strategy to bolster his own authority.<sup>11</sup>

In the excellent 2008 critical edition of Leo's extant homilies, the editor in her preface praises the emperor as 'a prominent literary figure of his time, who made a significant contribution to the homiletic genre'.<sup>12</sup> In the important monograph preceding the critical edition, she presented the first scholarly analysis of Leo's entire homiletic corpus, noting that Leo offers 'the highly intriguing image of an educated emperor ... who cultivated the image of his wisdom'.<sup>13</sup> This wisdom is demonstrated in many ways, not least of which is the ideological lens offered in his homilies. The only scholarly consideration of this ideological focus appeared 20 years ago in one very brief but illuminating chapter that demonstrated the theological richness of these orations.<sup>14</sup> It showed that the vocabulary of divine appointment to the imperial office appears regularly in the epilogues,

*Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 17 (1908), 75–85. E. McGeer, 'Two military orations of Constantine VII', in J. W. Nesbitt (ed.), *Byzantine Authors, Literary Activities and Preoccupations: Texts and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicholas Oikonomides* (Leiden, 2003), 111–35. Riedel, 'Demonic Prophecy'.

<sup>10</sup> H. Delehayé (ed.), *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris: Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Brussels, 1902), 893–904.

<sup>11</sup> M. L. D. Riedel, 'Biblical Echoes in Two Byzantine Military Speeches', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40.2 (2016), 207–22.

<sup>12</sup> T. Antonopoulou (ed.), *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae*, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 63 (Turnhout, 2008), xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, 1997), vii.

<sup>14</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 72–80. A new monograph on the political theology of the homilies is currently in preparation by Antonopoulou.

emphasizing the emperor's pastoral role, and providing a powerful way to communicate 'his Orthodoxy, his ability in the theological discussions, and above all, his being the "chosen one" for the throne'.<sup>15</sup>

The following pages attempt to survey initial theological features of a limited number of the homilies; because of this focus, the methodology employed here shall be more historical-theological than philological. The historical context and a fuller exposition of the theology of Leo's homilies, including an English translation, deserve a separate survey, because these orations were written to articulate and affirm Leo's distinctively Byzantine imperial political ideology. In particular, they tie religious observance to civil obedience and draw on Old Testament exegesis to justify these exhortations. The homilies thus invite the attention of a theologically trained historian, although a thorough theological analysis of Leo's homiletical corpus, while certainly still a desideratum, would constitute an entire monograph in itself, which space does not allow here.

### The Purpose of Homilies

Byzantine homiletics, as a genre admittedly still in the process of more thorough investigation and description, offers a unique perspective into the thought-world of the preacher; these compositions are fascinating because their goal is primarily to inspire, secondarily to educate or exhort, and frequently also to commemorate people or events. Although Byzantine sermons were often recycled, they were not necessarily originally composed according to template, thus the content and emphases of homilies reveal cultural priorities.<sup>16</sup> As such, homilies are historically conditioned and can best be understood within their original historical contexts. Indeed, several of Leo's homilies are rather innovative, in terms of their imagery, vocabulary, and structure.

Homilies all have two things in common: they are intended to be delivered orally (although many were later compiled into literary collections), and their target audience is usually catechumens as well as baptized Christians gathered together in the context of worship, in spaces dedicated to liturgy. They are generally 'not meant to offer sheer enjoyment apart from Christian teaching'.<sup>17</sup> This means that their most important component is

<sup>15</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> There are, to my knowledge, no rhetorical exercises for the composition of homilies, such as those that exist for other genres of Byzantine Greek literature.

<sup>17</sup> Antonopoulou, 'Byzantine Homiletics', 188.

their content, not their style. Every one of Leo's homilies was intended for a special occasion, demonstrating his facility for employing homilies for their greatest impact.<sup>18</sup>

Of the four Byzantine emperors who wrote homiletical works, Leo is unique for the number as well as the content of his 42 extant sermons. Of these, 40 are unanimously considered Leo's work, one that does not bear his name has nonetheless been identified as his work, and one is attributed to him by a majority of manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Most of his homilies were written to be delivered on major feast days, indicating a savvy awareness of those gatherings as opportunities to reinforce this special kind of imperial propaganda. They were not intended for ordinary Sundays of the movable ecclesiastical year, but only for special occasions.<sup>20</sup> Their composition was certainly coloured by the extraordinary theological sensitivities of (one of) the only Byzantine emperor(s) to compose homilies.<sup>21</sup> According to Antonopoulou, 39 of these were personally delivered by Leo.<sup>22</sup> Thus, of the 42 extant homilies, only three were delivered by someone other than Leo, because the emperor was engaged elsewhere at the time: one was read out by a secretary, one by an unnamed person, and one by his brother Stephen, serving as patriarch of Constantinople at that time (r. 886–93).<sup>23</sup>

Leo's homiletical output was restricted to the early years of his reign, during the patriarchates of his brother Stephen and Stephen's successor Antony II Kauleas (r. 893–901), neither of whom have left any extant homilies. Of course these men must have written and delivered sermons, but their terms coincide with a most unusual emperor who not only wrote homilies but had strong views on the relationship between the patriarch and the palace. Indeed, his homilies were not simply a hobby, written to pass the time. They were intended to develop and deepen 'his concept of the imperial idea'.<sup>24</sup>

In August of 886, when he was just 19 years old, Leo rose to sole rule. He immediately deposed his former tutor, Photios, from the patriarchal

<sup>18</sup> See A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, ed. Christine Angelidi (Athens, 2006), 61–5.

<sup>19</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*.

<sup>20</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 26–7.

<sup>21</sup> The other ones are Constantine I and Manuel II Komnenos. Justinian may have composed three little-known works on theology in the sixth century, but not, so far as is known, any homilies.

<sup>22</sup> T. Antonopoulou, 'Homiletic Activity in Constantinople around 900', in Mary Cunningham and Pauline Allen (eds.), *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* (Leiden, 1998), 319.

<sup>23</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 42.

throne and replaced him with the younger, and therefore possibly more malleable Stephen, Leo's own brother. He composed one homily very early in his reign for the consecration of Stephen in December of 886; the majority of the rest of his homilies were written before 899, indicating an intensively literary focus in the first half of his reign.<sup>25</sup> In 907, two decades into his sole rule and sometime after writing his last homily, Leo promulgated the *Procheiros Nomos* to replace Photios's *Eisagoge*. In it, he explicitly refuted Photios's claim that the patriarch and the emperor together ruled the empire.<sup>26</sup> However, this attitude had been signalled earlier in Leo's homiletical writings: the epilogues of Leo's homilies call for God's protection on the chosen emperor and the chosen people of the Byzantine *oikoumene*.<sup>27</sup> They make clear that it is the emperor's responsibility to shepherd the people; the absence of any mention of the patriarch underscores this imperial attitude.

### The Size of the Corpus

One might plausibly wonder at this point, if the emperor was so keen to write homilies, why are there only 42 extant? After all, the literature of this period is plentiful and deliberately preserved by the Byzantines themselves in a burst of encyclopaedic fervour that characterizes the Macedonian dynasty.<sup>28</sup> In fact, manuscripts of sermons outnumber those of most other genres in Byzantine literature, demonstrating that 'sermons represented one of the most popular literary genres.'<sup>29</sup> Despite numerous political setbacks, Leo VI managed to remain on the throne for 26 years, so why are there not more homilies? There are several probable reasons for this.

First, Leo's literary output was enormous; the homilies represent only one small part of Leo's oeuvre, although it is likely that he wrote more

<sup>25</sup> J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études sur Léon VI', *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), 193–4.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Epanagoge/Eisagoge*, promulgated sometime between 879 and 886, and likely written by Photios.

<sup>27</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> P. Odorico, 'La cultura della Συλλογή', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83 (1990), 1–21.

<sup>29</sup> M. Cunningham, 'Preaching and the Community', in R. Morris (ed.), *Church and People in Byzantium* (Birmingham, 1990), 29. A. Ehrhard's two volumes of hagiographical and homiletical manuscripts listed according to the church calendar run to more than 1200 pages, yet he lamented (Vol. 1, v) that even this massive collection was incomplete because so many manuscripts were not available to him for inspection. Cf. A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1937–8).

than the ones that have survived. He also wrote hymns,<sup>30</sup> laws,<sup>31</sup> economic regulations,<sup>32</sup> military manuals,<sup>33</sup> poetry,<sup>34</sup> and spiritual advice to monks.<sup>35</sup> He was an emperor who loved to learn, to write, to read, and to think. Since most of his homilies date to the earlier years of his reign, this likely indicates that later his attention was in demand elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the author of the *Life of Theophano*, a hagiographical text honouring Leo's first wife, remarks that in the early years of his reign, Leo occupied his time with religious writing, while Stylianos Zaoutzes (and others) managed the day-to-day governance of the empire.<sup>37</sup> However, he maintained throughout his reign the practice of delivering an oration on the Monday of the first week of Lent every year.<sup>38</sup> This took place at the palace of the Magnaura, where clergy, senators, and other government officials would gather to mark the beginning of the Great Feast, also known as Great Lent in the Orthodox tradition.<sup>39</sup>

Second, the daily liturgy of the church was not focused on the delivery of homilies, because, as is still the case today in Orthodox churches, the central event of Byzantine Orthodox worship in the ninth century was not preaching, but the celebration of the eucharistic mysteries.<sup>40</sup> This emphasis may be slightly unexpected for Protestants, whose liturgical

<sup>30</sup> Numerous other sources attest to the emperor's hymn-writing: one for the feast of Elijah (*De ceremoniis*, 114.22–115.3), one for St Demetrios (*De ceremoniis*, 123.22–25), one for the procession of the relics of Lazarus as they were translated to the Hagia Sophia (Arethas, *ASM* II, 14.6–7); one for the feast of Epiphany, according to Philotheos (N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de présence byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles: introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire* (Paris, 1972), 186–9); for a lengthy discussion of Leo's extensive hymnody, see also H. J. W. Tillyard, 'Εωθινὰ Ἀναστάσιμα. The Morning Hymns of the Emperor Leo. Part I', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 30 (1928–9), 86–108 and Part II, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 31 (1929–30), 115–47.

<sup>31</sup> He completed his father Basil I's recension of the Justinianic *Basilika*, plus his own 113 *Novels*.

<sup>32</sup> *Book of the Eparch*. See J. Koder (ed.), *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* (Vienna, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Most notably the *Taktika*, but also another shorter composition in his youth.

<sup>34</sup> N. G. Попов, *Императоръ Левъ VI. мудрый и его царствование въ церковно-историческомъ отношеніи* [The emperor Leo VI the Wise and his reign, from a historical-ecclesiastical point of view.] (Moscow, 1892, reprinted 2008), 228–32. See P. Maas, 'Literarisches zu der Vita Euthymii', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 21 (1912), 436–40. F. Ciccollella, 'Il carme anacreontico di Leone VI', *Bollettino dei Classici* 3.10 (1989), 17–37. M. Solarino, 'Alcune Osservazioni sull'ᾠδῶριον κατασκευτικόν di Leone VI il Saggio', *Siculorum Gymnasium* 40 (1987), 201–16. For a more detailed survey of his poetic output, see Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 19–21.

<sup>35</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 206–28.

<sup>36</sup> For the chronology of Leo's homilies, see T. Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 52–71.

<sup>37</sup> *Life of Theophano*, 14.16–20.

<sup>38</sup> See Homilies 29, 30, and 40.

<sup>39</sup> *De ceremoniis* 11.10; *Logothete Chronicle* 285.5–7.

<sup>40</sup> For a fuller discussion of the frequency and purpose of middle Byzantine homilies, see Cunningham, 'Preaching and the Community', 29–37.

traditions emphasize Word more often and sometimes more fully than Sacrament. In the Byzantine Orthodox tradition, these two parts of Christian worship are divided – the Liturgy of the Catechumens precedes the Liturgy of the Faithful – with the emphasis and primary importance very firmly on the second part. In the Byzantine era, no person who was not baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Church was permitted to remain in the gathered congregation after the Liturgy of the Catechumens. Thus, the homily, if offered, belongs to the Liturgy of the Catechumens, when the audience would theoretically have been most numerous, and as the name might suggest, in need of teaching and exhortation. The category of ‘catechumens’ would include not only those studying to become members of the church, but also for example diplomatic guests of the Constantinopolitan court, or foreign visitors like the Rus delegation who describe their amazement and wonder at the beauty of the liturgy in the Hagia Sophia in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.<sup>41</sup> Thus the ‘liturgy of the catechumens’ was not limited only to catechumens and does not depend on the presence of catechumens for its performance; it is and has always been a regular part of Orthodox liturgical ritual. Moreover, homilies are not always offered during the liturgy, further revealing their character as peripheral, particularly in comparison with the indispensable celebration of the eucharistic mysteries without which there is no liturgy at all.

The homily, if offered, would be delivered right after the entrance of the patriarch and the people, and before the Great Entrance of the eucharistic elements. The Eucharist was so central to Orthodox worship that it symbolized ‘a sort of ritual synecdoche, the entire Byzantine Divine Liturgy’.<sup>42</sup> Thus the homily, when included, functions in a sort of introductory capacity before the central ritual of worship – the blessing and partaking of the holy mysteries. According to middle Byzantine church *typika*, homilies were usually preached at all-night vigils or in the offices of the hours,<sup>43</sup> but always on feast days.<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that Leo’s

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (trs. and eds.), *Russian Primary Chronicle/Povest' vremennykh let: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, MA, 1953).

<sup>42</sup> R. F. Taft, ‘The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34–35 (1980–81), 53.

<sup>43</sup> These were set times of Christian prayer, a practice that developed in the early church that is well attested from the third century on. The hours were the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day, in addition to rising, before retiring, and during the night. Cf. R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in the Christian East: Origins, Meaning, Place in the Life of the Church* (Rome, 1983), 14–35.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the development of the Byzantine liturgy, see Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, tr. M. J. O’Connell (New York, 1986; orig. pub. in German, 1980); R. F. Taft, *Through Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw It* (Berkeley, 2006).

homilies are exclusively intended for church feasts or other special events, such as church dedications, as befit his status, not for the usual Sunday celebrations. Therefore, when Leo delivered his homilies, it was normally before especially large congregations, gathered for important occasions.

Third, as devices of imperial propaganda, homilies are of limited use, because their structure and function is limited by the medium itself. Indeed, as an 'optional' part of the liturgy, directed at the whole gathering regardless of church membership, the homily would be prefatory to the central focus. Such a placement naturally limits the length of such orations. Indeed, 'Leo wrote relatively short homilies for special occasions but longer ones on feast days.'<sup>45</sup> On feast days, however, the presence of the emperor would guarantee a larger and possibly more attentive audience. This is known by means of the protocols for feast days preserved in the *Book of Ceremonies*, compiled by Leo's son, Constantine VII (d.959). In particular, the participants expected to attend feast day liturgies are notified the day before the scheduled feast day and the details of their activities are described.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Importance of the Homilies**

Despite the limited size of his homiletic corpus relative to the number of homilies composed by clergy, the homilies written by Leo VI represent a uniquely large collection of such writings produced by an emperor, and as such, are important. Significantly, they are very rare. No other emperor writes homilies with such regularity; in fact, before Leo, only one imperial homily was produced in the fourth century, and after Leo, only one (though whether it can be properly called a homily is disputed) by his own son in the tenth century and, much later, one in the fifteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Like Leo's compositions, these other imperial homilies were written for special occasions. Yet Leo VI is extraordinary in his decision to create and deliver dozens of homilies, including on feast days especially meaningful to him. This is not noteworthy merely for being odd. His homilies are interesting for what they reveal about the interests and methods of this unusual emperor, and particularly the ways he sought to influence public opinion early in his reign using material with which he was most comfortable, that is, religious teaching.

<sup>45</sup> T. Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> *De ceremoniis* 1.1; A. Moffatt and M. Tall (eds.) *Constantine Porphyrogenetos, The Book of Ceremonies*, Vols. 1–2 (Canberra, 2012), 6.

<sup>47</sup> See [note 21](#) of this chapter.

Antonopoulou lists Leo's homilies in the following order:

1. On the Annunciation (25 March)
2. On Palm Sunday
3. On the Burial of Christ 4
4. On the Resurrection (Easter Sunday)
5. On the Ascension (40 days after Easter)
6. On Pentecost
7. On the Holy Spirit (Monday after Pentecost)
8. On All Saints (Sunday after Pentecost)
9. On St Paul
10. On the Transfiguration I
11. On the Transfiguration II
12. On the Dormition of the Virgin (15 August)
13. On the Beheading of St John the Baptist (29 August)
14. Funeral Oration to Basil I and Eudocia Ingerina
15. On the Birth of the Virgin (8 September)
16. On the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September)
17. On St Demetrios I
18. On St Demetrios II
19. On the Dedication of a church to St Demetrios
20. On the Presentation of the Virgin (21 November)
21. On St Nicholas (6 December)
22. On the Ordination of the Patriarch Stephen
23. On the Nativity of the Lord (25 December)
24. On St Stephen (27 December)
25. On Epiphany (6 January)
26. On St Clement (23 January)
27. On St Trypho (1 February)
28. On the Presentation of the Lord (2 February)
29. On the Beginning of Lent I
30. On the Beginning of Lent II
31. On the Dedication of a church in the monastery of Kauleas
32. On the Dedication of the church of St Thomas
33. Homily delivered on the Feast of St Thomas (6 October)
34. Homily delivered on the feast of the prophet Elijah on the anniversary of Leo's deliverance from prison (20 July)
35. Homily delivered in St Sophia on Epiphany (6 January)
36. Catholic Epistle
37. On the Dedication of the church of Stylianos Zaoutzes



38. On St John Chrysostom (13 November)
39. On the Transfiguration III
40. On the Beginning of Lent III
41. On the Translation of John Chrysostom (27 January)
42. On the Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June)

Thirty-three of Leo's homilies are connected to fixed feast days.<sup>48</sup> The other nine are not sermons as such but rather discourses for special events, mostly church dedications. Three of these mark important historical moments early in Leo's reign: a eulogy for Leo's parents, the installation of his brother Stephen to the patriarchate, and a commemoration on the feast day of the prophet Elijah to celebrate Leo's release from three years of house arrest in the summer of 886.<sup>49</sup> None of the homilies is dedicated to exegesis of a particular biblical text.

The emperor's focus on such literary compositions was enabled by the highly competent governance of the empire under his chamberlain, Stylianos Zaoutzes, whose daughter he married in 898, and for whom he composed a homily at the dedication of a church to Stylianos. Stylianos died in disgrace in 899, and his daughter, who had become Leo's second wife, also died later that same year.<sup>50</sup> Although Leo wrote few homilies after this date, it is in 899 that his name first appears with the epithet 'the Wise' attached to it.<sup>51</sup> It is this reputation for wisdom that Leo exploits to prove his fitness and even divine calling to rulership.

Unsurprisingly, Leo's homilies reinforce classic roles for Byzantine rulers: those of father, pilot, and shepherd; these same roles are also held up as models in the *Taktika*. What is the rationale behind the emperor's repeated claim to model these images of leadership? This man was subjected to three years of imprisonment under suspicion of treason from 883 to 886, and narrowly escaped being blinded by his own father, whose rage was tempered by the counsel of the patriarch Photios and Basil's advisor Stylianos Zaoutzes to choose mercy. Because Leo was a second son, never intended for leadership, but rather educated to be a scholar, it seems likely that he would seek to justify his elevation to sole rule in undeniable terms. His reign was somewhat unexpected, even accidental; it only came about because of the unexpected early deaths of his elder

<sup>48</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 24–6.

<sup>49</sup> For a survey of published editions and translations of Leo's homilies up to 1997, see Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 27–34.

<sup>50</sup> S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 64–83.

<sup>51</sup> Tougher, *Reign*, 84–85. Oikonomidès, *Les listes*, 81.3.

brother in 879 and his father in 886. Apart from the ‘last man standing’ quality of his accession to the throne, what did Leo have to offer as a worthy successor to Basil I?

A key aspect of his image management lay in the way he appropriated Byzantine religious belief and practice, and this is evident also in his homiletic addresses. Because he was not a classic imperial military hero like Basil I, Leo sought to downplay his total lack of military experience and portray himself as a remarkably worthy emperor on account of his wisdom and his public piety, which was partly displayed in his homilies. To this end, he emphasized spiritual qualifications that demonstrated his ability to guide the ship of state safely through the hazards of contemporary political challenges. He intended to communicate that he was divinely chosen to rule, and had not come to the throne accidentally or arbitrarily. The very structure of his military manual, which describes a spiritual hierarchy in which God rules through the emperor as vicegerent and the general is subordinate to the emperor, testifies to Leo’s political and spiritual priorities. Writing homilies buttressed imperial standards and demonstrated Leo’s spiritual authority.

Although the vast majority of Leo’s homiletical corpus are festal homilies for the fixed dominical and Marian feast days, in addition to celebrations of saints, greater interest can be found in those that were composed for special occasions. In particular, a very brief consideration of three may be useful: the one he wrote to commemorate his parents, the special homily he delivered for the consecration of his brother Stephen as patriarch, and the celebratory oration on the occasion of his deliverance from house arrest. Together, these three discourses represent *in nuce* the public face that Leo presented about the Macedonian dynasty, his own imperial image, and of course, his views on the use of Christian theology in governance. They reveal why he found it necessary to contradict thoroughly Photios’s description of power as an endeavour shared between emperor and patriarch. Although Leo also did this through his later military manual – which remained utterly silent on the role of the patriarch, effectively cutting the church out of the direct line of authority from God – it is his homilies, and particularly the one on 20 July, the feast of Elijah, that show how the emperor used the pulpit to disseminate his particular ideological and political views.

### Three Political Homilies

In Homily 34, delivered on the feast day of Elijah – celebrated on 20 July to commemorate his own release from house arrest – he demonstrates his

own view of his patron saint.<sup>52</sup> According to the *Kletorologion*, the celebration of the feast of Elijah was a five-day affair.<sup>53</sup> It began on the evening of 19 July, with a special vespers service at the Pharos church on the palace grounds, where the emperor would give small silver crosses to the gathered Byzantine officials. The next day, the emperor would receive even more city officials, hand out gold crosses, and everyone would take part in a public religious procession from the Pharos to the Nea Church (built by his father), where they would celebrate the liturgy and, no doubt, hear Leo's homily on Elijah. Afterward, there would be a banquet in the imperial throne room, the Chrysotriklinos; on successive days there would also be a reception, a dance, a footrace, another banquet, and a hippodrome festival with chariot-racing. All of this combined for a lengthy, week-long mid-summer celebration, offering an annual opportunity for Leo to display his personal piety and gratitude to his patron saint.

This, the most personal of all of Leo's extant homilies, is fairly long. Strangely, however, although Leo embeds the story of his own release from prison into the hagiographical context of Elijah's feast, calling it 'my story', there are few autobiographical details. He recalls the events of his imprisonment and commemorates his release, praises the prophet Elijah for his part as a heavenly mediator in securing Leo's freedom, and most interestingly, includes a somewhat vague confession of his own guilt that triggered his imprisonment.

The assembled audience would have been sympathetic, as Antonopoulou notes, since they were survivors of the purges that followed Leo's accession to the throne.<sup>54</sup> This is an important point, because Leo's spiritual hierarchy necessitated an emperor worthy of a God who had suffered before achieving victory. Unlike some Western formulations that emphasize Christ's victory, Eastern Christianity comfortably accommodates the idea of suffering as a prerequisite to reaching the dignity of the high calling to vicegerent of the deity. In order to reflect more fully the piety and wisdom of the divine ruler, Leo VI, the earthly ruler, thus demonstrates the parallel in his own life: he too was unjustly condemned, yet in a sense was raised again to life abundant with the restoration of his position as emperor. The ending of the oration is somewhat amusing as Leo remarks that he would

<sup>52</sup> For the Greek text, see Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini. Homiliae*, 446–50.

<sup>53</sup> *De ceremoniis* 11.52–3; Moffatt and Tall, *Book of Ceremonies*, 776–8.

<sup>54</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 235.

like to continue speaking but could tell from his listeners' expressions that it was time to stop.<sup>55</sup>

One might find slightly presumptuous Leo's habit of writing and delivering religious sermons that exhort his hearers to acts of piety, in no small part because he publicly flouted his own civil laws.<sup>56</sup> But this admission of guilt, however cryptic, provided a picture of the emperor as a humble man unexpectedly raised to the throne and dependent on the mercies of saints. Elijah was particularly appropriate for this protective role because of his high prestige as a biblical prophet who vanquished the spiritual enemies of God (1 Kings 18:20–40) and, perhaps more significantly, taught the power of true faith to those in need of divine provision.<sup>57</sup> The religious rhetoric of this homily reinforced Leo's worthiness as a successor to Basil I, because Leo was an appropriately pious Christian and therefore well placed to redeem the reputation of his father, a soldier with a chequered past. Indeed, the protection of the venerable Elijah over the Macedonian dynasty bore proof of Leo's worthiness.<sup>58</sup>

In Homily 22, Leo demonstrated early in his reign his determination to retain the superiority of imperial power over patriarchal authority. In December of 886, Leo appointed his brother Stephen to the patriarchal throne, although Stephen was not officially qualified because of his youth. In the homily intended to celebrate his brother Stephen's promotion to patriarch, one can discern the unpopularity of the emperor's move.<sup>59</sup> He takes pains to justify why Stephen is an appropriate choice for patriarch despite his young age and bears witness to Stephen's virtues, in part to allay misgivings on the part of his audience. Leo portrays Stephen as a paragon of righteousness and beauty. He addresses his audience in four parts: the fathers – who were likely members of the senate, according to Grosdidier de Matons, then the bishops, Stephen himself, and God, to whom Leo prays for protection over the new patriarch.<sup>60</sup> He reminds them that Stephen was dedicated to God as soon as he was born and that he has

<sup>55</sup> Kazhdan, *History of Byzantine literature*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> N. Oikonomidès, 'Leo VI's Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages. An Interpolation in the *Procheiros Nomos* (IV, 25–27)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 173–93.

<sup>57</sup> 1 Kings 17:8–24.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the feast day of Elijah, see É. Poirot, 'La fête du sainte Prophète Élie dans la liturgie byzantine', *Ecclesia Orans* 9 (1992), 173–99. For more on the significance of Elijah for Leo and his dynasty, see P. Magdalino, 'Basil I, Leo VI and the Feast of the Prophet Elijah', *Jahrbuch der Österreichische Byzantinistik* 38 (1988), 193–6.

<sup>59</sup> For the Greek text, see Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini. Homiliae*, 299–303.

<sup>60</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études', 206–28.

uncommon virtue, despite being only a teenager. The emphasis in this short homily is on the personal piety of the Macedonians, and on Stephen in particular. Stephen, already a monk, was only 19 years old when he ascended to the patriarchal throne and appeared to cooperate with Leo's philosophy of governance, participating in the reburial of Michael III at the Holy Apostles in September 886.<sup>61</sup> Stephen died in 893, and was succeeded by Antony Kauleas, another partisan of Leo's.

The reburial of Michael III, who may have been Leo's biological father, shows that Leo was concerned to redeem the sin of murder perpetrated against Michael by Basil I, Leo's legal father. Perhaps it sprang from a desire to honour a man who might have deserved the dignities due a father according to the fourth commandment, which dictates honouring one's parents. Uniquely, this commandment attaches a consequence for obedience: 'so that your days may be long',<sup>62</sup> a promise no Byzantine emperor could disregard, particularly one steeped in religious learning. Leo showed himself very thorough in his filial piety, because in addition to the honour conferred on Michael III by his interment at the Church of the Holy Apostles, Leo also composed a eulogy for Basil I. One might reasonably be surprised by this, given the coolness of their relationship and Basil's obvious mistrust of Leo.<sup>63</sup> However, Leo's choices to honour in these various ways both of the men who may have been his biological father reveal a young man determined to be blameless in filial piety.

In Homily 14, the post-mortem oration eulogizing Basil I delivered in 888, Leo's public attitude towards the Macedonian dynasty is even more powerfully on display.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this is the most obvious example of dynastic propaganda in Leo's oeuvre.<sup>65</sup> Because of Basil's violent past, his murder of Michael III, and his obscure and perhaps ignominious origin, Leo attempts to account for God's choosing of Basil, thereby bolstering the divine chosenness of Leo and the Macedonian dynasty. Most of all, Leo here attempts to renovate the idea of the sacrality of imperial power, emphasizing the role of divine sovereignty in raising Basil to the throne and in predestining Eudokia to become his wife. God's favour is further proven by the recounting of Basil's achievements, which Leo says brought about a new golden age for the empire. This encomium glosses over Basil's widely known and shameful actions prior to taking the throne and describes his

<sup>61</sup> Tougher, *Reign*, 62, n.102.

<sup>62</sup> Exod 20:12.

<sup>63</sup> Tougher, *Reign*, 35–6.

<sup>64</sup> For the Greek text, see Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini. Homiliae*, 195–218.

<sup>65</sup> See A. Vogt and I. Hausherr, *Oraison funèbre de Basile I par son fils Léon VI le Sage* (Rome, 1932).

father instead as one who was given to rule by God, not by his own political machinations. There is also nothing in this speech to indicate any tension between Leo and his father, despite their fraught relationship. The entire piece was intended to legitimize Basil and thereby the entire family, including Leo, as divinely chosen emperors.

Kazhdan sees this homily as coming ‘close to the reinvention of the genre of the princely mirror’ because Leo inserts an apology for the brevity of his remarks, citing his own grief and heavy responsibilities as a ruler; had he more time, Leo says, he would have written a fuller icon of his parents.<sup>66</sup> Dagrón has noted that Leo VI ‘was, almost in excess, an autocrat of perfect Christian legitimacy’.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in this homily, Leo professes to believe that ‘the charismata of kingship are not very far from those of priesthood’ thus reinforcing his own sacerdotal kingship, a quality necessary for an emperor claiming a biblical legacy worthy of Elijah and Solomon. The influence of his homilies is not in question however. There is evidence that his compositions were read by later writers, and that he influenced them in the composition of later homilies. The discussion of a tenth-century homily at least partly inspired by Leo’s Homily 42 on the birth of John the Baptist provides one example of this.<sup>68</sup>

### Audience of the Homilies

Whom does Leo address in the homilies? The enormous number and distribution of the manuscripts of these writings reveal their popularity and broad geographical dissemination.<sup>69</sup> Originally, however, some were addressed to what Antonopoulou calls ‘a restricted audience’.<sup>70</sup> This meant only clergy and government officials gathered at the imperial palace, or the senate gathered at the Magnaura palace on the first Monday in Lent, in the Hagia Sophia before senators and bishops, or to his annual dinner guests in a traditional postprandial speech. However, on other occasions, his homilies were delivered before an ecclesiastical audience of gathered churchgoers. The effect that Leo desired to make upon his hearers is

<sup>66</sup> Kazhdan, *History of Byzantine Literature*, 64.

<sup>67</sup> G. Dagrón, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003), 122.

<sup>68</sup> T. Antonopoulou, ‘A Textual Source and Its Contextual Implications: on Theodore Daphnopates’ Sermon *On the Birth of John the Baptist*’, *Byzantion* 81 (2011), 9–18.

<sup>69</sup> The manuscript tradition is so extensive that it takes up 200 pages in the critical edition of the corpus. See Antonopoulou, *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae*, xvii–ccxvi.

<sup>70</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 38.

evident in the epilogues of his homilies, which ‘always call for God’s protection on the chosen emperor and his people’.<sup>71</sup>

Ultimately, both he and they are the chosen people, the Christians of the Byzantine empire, the [only] people of God. There are no ‘people of God’ or ‘chosen people’ outside of the *oikoumene* under Leo’s rule.<sup>72</sup> The hegemony of Christ is coterminous, in the Byzantine view, with the empire of the Romans and its capital city of Constantinople. The Christians who hear his orations belong to Leo, God’s appointed shepherd of His flock (ποιμνιον). The following chapter attempts to unfurl this idea, as it was promulgated by this most religious of Byzantine emperors.

<sup>71</sup> Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> See the discussion in Antonopoulou, *Homilies*, 72–80.

*Byzantines as 'Chosen People'*

Leo VI was not a theologian, in the formal sense of the word, because his writings are not, strictly speaking, works of theology. Nor was he an expert in exegesis, despite his superior religious education. However, he was a deeply religious man, familiar with the tenets of his faith and therefore able to interpret Christian holy writings with some deftness. Thus as someone profoundly educated about his faith tradition, he appropriated two lenses on the idea of chosenness in his writings.

First, he viewed himself as a new Solomon, and therefore used quotations and allusions, often from the biblical book of Proverbs (traditionally believed to have been written by Solomon), to illustrate or support his claims in the *Taktika*. It should come as no surprise that he framed his military manual as an ideological solution to a contemporary problem, nor that he quoted scripture in the framing constitutions, that is, the Prologue, Epilogue, Constitution 2, and Constitution 20. In his *Novels*, he also appealed to Solomonic virtues related to wisdom, like order, clarity, reasonableness, and proportionality in his legislation in an effort to direct what he viewed as a properly Christian approach to law keeping.

Second, he followed standard Byzantine hermeneutical trajectories in his use of Old Testament texts to identify the Byzantines as the successors to the biblical Israelites, but only sometimes, when it suited him. Leo VI implicitly enriched the ideal of Orthodox Christians as chosen people by explicitly asserting his own divine chosenness, appealing to early canonical decrees regarding correct behaviour for a Christian *politeia*, and expanding Orthodox political identity to include an appropriation of the Old Testament history of the people of Israel, whose bellicose God saved his chosen people from all danger and ensured victory over their enemies.

Leo's approach does not constitute a departure from Byzantine cultural attitudes towards scripture, nor does it violate medieval Orthodox exegesis with regard to the status of eastern Christians as a people special to God.



In 1982, Alexander Kazhdan addressed the uniqueness of Byzantine society in an essay titled 'Homo byzantinus before God', in which he considered several scholarly approaches to religion in Byzantium and explained how they fall short. Instead of viewing theology as 'human stupidity, a hieroglyph of political aspirations, [or] a link in the independent development of religious and philosophical thought',<sup>1</sup> Kazhdan proposed situating Byzantine theology in its historical context, within the framework of time, as opposed to a set of abstract principles. In other words, he was convinced that one could not fully grasp the priorities and influence of religious thought without embracing its contribution to its historical context as well as its solutions to the problems of the time. This chapter seeks to explore the characteristically Byzantine articulation of 'chosen people theology' in the context of early medieval imperial politics and especially how those politics, or political theology, impinged on the collective identity of Byzantine Christians.<sup>2</sup>

For modern theorists of national identity, religion is irrelevant because it is a 'residual' category, now largely replaced by nationalism.<sup>3</sup> However, for the pre-modern culture scholars call Byzantium, religion remained influential throughout the thousand years of the empire's survival. Curiously, even social scientists of the well-known idea of chosenness see in Byzantium fault lines rather than unity. According to one modern ethnographer with a dim view of Byzantine culture,

Byzantium provides a classic instance. Here, the ideology of universal empire, inherited from Rome, underpinned and gave material expression to the universalism of Christian faith. Yet, within that faith as it sought to convert the civilized world, as within the empire itself, pre-existing cultural and ethnic differences soon made themselves felt, exerting an influence in relation both to theological schism and to political policy.<sup>4</sup>

This description of Byzantium as fatally fractured and pluralistic is belied by its eleven centuries of institutional stability spanning three continents and a multiplicity of languages, as well as the influence of its Christian legacy and the durability of its theology. So why is the idea of Byzantium

<sup>1</sup> A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1982, reprinted 1996), 77.

<sup>2</sup> One of the desiderata of modern scholarship is a full monograph on the history of the idea of chosenness in religions of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. There is unfortunately no space in the present work to examine this idea exhaustively, thus this chapter consciously focuses only on the use of the idea as developed in middle Byzantium and especially by Leo VI.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford, 2003), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 96.

as a 'chosen people' so lightly regarded? Smith's view betrays perhaps sub-conscious subscription to a distorted Gibbonesque view of Byzantine history that considers it 'a tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery'.<sup>5</sup> The more interesting question to ask is: how influential was Christianity in this multi-ethnic, multi-lingual empire? More to the point, how did Byzantines appropriate the Jewish concept of chosenness from the Greek Bible (LXX), and what purpose did such an appropriation serve in relation to societal goals pursued by the Macedonian dynasty?

Methodologically, it is indispensable to treat the Bible like any other historical text, while acknowledging its status in the eyes of Byzantine Christians as holy, or divinely inspired. If the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is correct that common experience 'shape[s] the spiritual consciousness' of a culture, then the thesis is plausible: religion does not merely interpret reality, but also shapes it on a cultural scale.<sup>6</sup> In our search to understand the thought-world of the Byzantines, the omission of biblical materials from scrutiny thus substantially hinders our scholarly progress.

### Knowledge of the Greek Bible in Byzantium

One fruitful line of enquiry may lie in understanding how Byzantines viewed the foundational documents of the Orthodox Christian faith, that is, the Greek Bible, and the early Greek fathers' interpretation of it. It may be useful to clarify what is meant by the Christian scriptures used by the Byzantines. The Septuagint (LXX) is a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>7</sup> traditionally dated to the third century BCE (with several additional original Greek compositions), and it has a complex and difficult history.<sup>8</sup> Although it varies from the later Masoretic text of the Hebrew

<sup>5</sup> E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury 9th ed. (London, 1925), 169.

<sup>6</sup> C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966, reprinted 2004), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Biblical books accepted as canonical by the Jews are the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, plus the Prophets, consisting of: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1/2), Kings (1/2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Minor Prophets (= one book: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi), and what they call the Writings: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (= one book), Chronicles (1/2).

<sup>8</sup> The key primary source document that purports to describe the origin of the LXX is the *Letter of Aristeas*, which survives in 23 manuscripts. It was known by Josephus (*Antiquities*, Book 12) and Eusebius (*Praeparatio Evangelica*, Books 8–9), both of whom paraphrase parts of it and appear to have accepted it as a legitimate historical document. However, its historicity has been challenged by modern scholars since the sixteenth century. For a fuller discussion, including relevant scholarship, see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (Leiden, 2000), ch. 3.

scriptures in some substantial ways, there is no doubt the Byzantines viewed the LXX as inspired and accepted it as the orthodox version of the Christian Old Testament and apocrypha.<sup>9</sup>

The textual tradition of the New Testament is not at issue, as one will see after even the most cursory glance at the critical apparatus in the Nestle-Aland editions, which cite hundreds of instances that confirm the character of the Byzantine texts as among the majority readings. Given the sheer number of manuscripts of the biblical writings, their status as foundational to the Byzantine educational system (elite though it was), and the esteem in which they were held as holy books, it should come as no surprise that the Byzantines were less concerned with jots and tittles than are modern scholars with text-critical sensitivities.

The idea of canonicity did not carry the same fascination in the east as it does among modern-day Protestants. Byzantine churches used primarily lectionaries to promulgate biblical texts and stories for the faithful. These collections of excerpts offered a variety of LXX writings, as well as New Testament writings, with the notable exception of the Book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse. Indeed ‘even still today one finds a kind of silent echo of this writing’s liminal past in the context of Eastern Christian worship, where the Apocalypse is never read.’<sup>10</sup>

How much of the Septuagint (LXX) did the Byzantines know? Did they read, recite, or sing it? And most important, how did they interpret it to fit their self-image as divinely chosen? Most Byzantines probably learned the words of scripture in worship through the liturgical use of lectionaries.<sup>11</sup> If this is right, then in terms of the Old Testament scripture, the

<sup>9</sup> E. Tov, ‘The Nature of the Large-Scale Differences Between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources’, in Adrian Schenker (ed.), *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered* (Leiden/Boston, 2003) 121–44. English translations of Old Testament verses referenced in this article are drawn from the scholarly translation of the LXX produced in 2007 and sponsored by the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies; English translations of New Testament verses are from the recent English Standard Version, first published in 2001. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford, 2007). *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, 2001). An ecclesiastical translation has also been recently published in English: *The Orthodox Study Bible: Ancient Christianity Speaks to Today’s World* (Englewood, 2008). These two versions were chosen because both embrace an ‘essentially literal’ approach to translation based on the maxim ‘as literal as possible, as free as necessary.’

<sup>10</sup> S. Shoemaker, ‘The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium’, *The New Testament in Byzantium*. 2013 Byzantine Studies Symposium, April 26–28, 2013. Dumbarton Oaks, conference abstract.

<sup>11</sup> G. Zuntz, ‘Das byzantinische Septuaginta-Lektionar (‘Prophetologion’)', *Classica et Mediaevalia: Revue danoise de philologie et d’histoire* 17 (1956), 183. Quoted by J. Miller, ‘The Prophetologion: The Old Testament of Byzantine Christianity?’ in P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2010), 56.

average person knew extremely little, since the Old Testament lectionaries contained less than 15 per cent of the text of the Old Testament. Miller has argued that these Old Testament lectionaries, known collectively as the *Prophetologion*, by virtue of their ubiquity and content ought to be considered the de facto Old Testament of the Byzantines.<sup>12</sup> If this analysis holds, then the average Byzantine did indeed hear and possibly recite at least some of the scriptures in the LXX. However, that knowledge would have been limited. Knowledge of the LXX among the literate classes however, who comprised the primary audience for Leo VI’s literary works, would have been much more extensive, simply by virtue of their education, which from the middle Byzantine era included religious instruction.<sup>13</sup> In addition, eastern Christians were regularly exhorted from the pulpit to read the scriptures; whether they followed this advice is difficult to discern.<sup>14</sup>

### Liturgical Use of Scripture

One of the more obvious points of contact between Jewish exegesis and Byzantine appropriation of the Jewish scriptures can be found in the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer as preparation (or *anaphora*) immediately before the distribution of the Eucharist. The end of the Lord’s Prayer, with the worship of God’s name, and the invocation of the coming of God’s kingdom imitate the *kaddish* prayer, which concluded the synagogue service in the Jewish liturgy.<sup>15</sup> Early Byzantine liturgies, dominated by the Alexandrian school of exegesis, presented the celebration of communion as an eschatological event that echoed the heavenly liturgy. After Germanos (patriarch of Constantinople, d.733), the liturgy included more Antiochene symbolism, adding historicizing allegories to explain the items of the Great Entrance: the cover over the *diskos* (paten) represents the cloth placed over Christ’s face in the tomb, the *aer* (altar cloth) represents the stone sealing

<sup>12</sup> Miller, ‘Prophetologion’, 60.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller description of the standard education in Byzantium beginning in the ninth century, see P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1971), 100–4. See also V. Ježek, ‘Education As a Unifying and “Uplifting” Force in Byzantium’, *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007), 167–200.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom: ‘Do not tarry for another teacher, you have the words of God; no one teaches you as they ... Do not just look into them, but take them wholly within you, keep them in your mind. This is the cause of all evils, lack of knowledge of scripture.’ Homily IX, in *Ep ad Coloss.*, 111. ET: P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1955), 13: 300–1.

<sup>15</sup> R. F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Vol 5, The Precommunion Rites*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 261 (Rome, 2000), 134. See also B. Graubard, ‘The Kaddish Prayer’, in J. J. Petuchowski and M. Brocke (eds.), *The Lord’s Prayer and Jewish Liturgy* (New York, 1978), 59–72.

the tomb, the deacon who removes the *aer* represents the angel who rolls away the stone and proclaims the resurrection.<sup>16</sup> The point of this shift was to pull the worshipper into salvation history, to make him or her a participant in it. Such a move reflects the pursuit of an active inclusion of the worshipper that goes beyond the didactic and draws him or her into personal identification with the deity.

The Byzantine lectionaries drew readings primarily from Genesis, Isaiah, and most often, from the Psalms, which were read or sung in some form in every worship session.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, literate Byzantines learned to read by using the Bible as a textbook; they memorized psalms as a matter of course. However, Byzantine exegesis of the Psalms was based on the LXX, which mistranslated, added, or subtracted from the original Hebrew text. It is worth noting that the LXX, produced several centuries before the advent of Christianity, is a witness to an early alternative Hebrew text, not the standard Masoretic text that many Christian theologians today view as the 'original' text, which dates from the second century CE and forms the basis of most modern English translations.<sup>18</sup> Therefore there are a number of significant differences to what Westerners understand to be the standard Bible.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Christian use of the Jewish scriptures, drawn from the LXX, and the debate between Jews and Christians in the early medieval period over the prefiguring of Christ in biblical literature has long been clearly documented and described by Jaroslav Pelikan.<sup>20</sup> It is not the purpose of this chapter to rehash this debate.

The argument of this chapter is also not to weigh the accuracy or efficacy of this understanding of the significance of Byzantine liturgical symbolism. Rather, this chapter seeks to consider how the Byzantines viewed the 'chosen people' theology of the scriptures, and how they applied it

<sup>16</sup> P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood, NY, 1984), 45–8.

<sup>17</sup> The Byzantine Old Testament lectionaries offer no readings from a number of canonical books. Excluded narrative books: Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, 2 Esdras (known as *Ezra*/Nehemiah), Esther, Judith, Tobit, 1–4 Maccabees. Wisdom literature not included: Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and the Song of Songs. No readings from several minor prophets: Hosea, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai.

<sup>18</sup> For a more thorough discussion of this, see T. M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford, 2013), 5–7 and 19–32.

<sup>19</sup> The LXX includes at least ten books (*Anaginoskomena*) known to Protestants as 'deuterocanonical' and several more (*Apocrypha*) known as 'pseudepigrapha'. See G. Kalantzis, 'Scripture in Eastern Orthodoxy: Canon, Tradition, and Interpretation', in M. Bird and M. Pahl (eds.), *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures* (Piscataway, NJ, 2010), 199–213.

<sup>20</sup> J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 2: *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom, 600–1700* (Chicago, 1974), esp. 200–15.

to themselves, particularly since Byzantine culture was unapologetically anti-Judaic from the beginning. The emperor Leo VI – as a member of the Macedonian dynasty, and as the creator of extensive literary compositions marked by religious themes – also appropriated this theology for promulgating the vision of the ideal Byzantine *oikoumene* as the home of a Christian 'chosen people', albeit in a less explicit way. Leo would have been familiar with the lectionaries, including the *Prophetologion*, as a regular attender of worship, but he would have studied them even more deeply than the average citizen, given his elite education under the tutelage of Photios.

### The Scriptural Basis for 'Chosen People' Theology

In the LXX, the main indications of chosenness are to be found wherever one encounters national crises: the exodus from Egypt, the sentences of exile, and the prophecies of return from exile. It has been said that crises do not create identity, but rather reveal it. The foundational event that establishes Israel's chosenness was the exodus from Egypt. In the biblical book of Exodus, written about events believed to have taken place in the mid fifteenth century BCE, Moses receives the law of God on Mount Sinai, and then he is told by the voice of God to announce to the rest of the Israelites that they are to be 'people special above all nations' (περιούσιος λαός).<sup>21</sup> After Moses has delivered the extended list of statutes for the Israelites to follow, this phrase is repeated as a promise from God.<sup>22</sup> With every reminder of Israelite identity in Deuteronomy, which describes events approximately two generations after the exodus, the same or related vocabulary is used yet again; there can be no mistake that these people believed that they were special to God.<sup>23</sup>

However, the prophets of the Old Testament did not shy away from announcing defeat and exile for the chosen people when they neglected to obey divine laws; the remarkable part of these prophecies is that the language of chosenness is employed even in a portent of doom. For example, the writings of the prophet Hosea, dated to the middle of the eighth century BCE, announce impending exile at the hands of the Assyrians. Strikingly, the prophecy ends on a positive note, emphasizing the faithfulness of

<sup>21</sup> Exod 19:5. ET: *New English Translation of the Septuagint*.

<sup>22</sup> Exod 23:22.

<sup>23</sup> Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18.

Hosea's deity, and referring to the disobedient people of Jerusalem as 'God's holy people' (λαός ἅγιος ... Θεοῦ).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, when the Israelites were promised an end to exile, the language of chosenness is used. For example, the prophecy of Zechariah, dated to the sixth century BCE, claims that not only would the people return from exile in Babylon, but their city, Jerusalem, would be chosen (αἰρετιεῖ) by God.<sup>25</sup> Even after the return from Babylon, when all gratitude had been forgotten, and Malachi somewhat sarcastically prophesies the eschatological day of judgement, still he uses the language of chosenness. Immediately before the terrible prophecy of fire and destruction, Malachi declares that God will claim his people in a deliberate act of choosing reminiscent of the favour shown by a parent towards his own son (αἰρετιῶ αὐτοῦς ὄν τρόπον αἰρετίζει ἄνθρωπος τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ).<sup>26</sup>

In the New Testament, these same ideas were taken up and repeated with reference to those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah long awaited by the Jews. The classic text for this comes from 1 Peter, an epistle that offers the most polished Greek in the New Testament, where a lengthy passage describes the chosenness of the people to whom the letter is written. Immediately after quoting the LXX of the prophet Isaiah – who also uses a vocabulary of chosenness (ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον) – the writer of the epistle reminds his readers that they are 'a chosen people (γένος ἐκλεκτόν), a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (λαός εἰς περιποίησιν ... λαός Θεοῦ)'.<sup>27</sup>

Although Byzantines liked and adopted the motif of chosenness found in both Jewish and Christian religious writings, they preferred the character of the law-giving deity as presented in the Jewish scriptures for the purposes of political rhetoric. Leo VI's attention to the cleansing of the law, his deliberate 'reawakening' of military science, and the overt display of his personal piety in delivering homilies – none of which were activities that anyone might reasonably have expected from this particular emperor – demonstrate his understanding of the role of the emperor as the divinely chosen representative of God on earth. This preference of the Byzantines for the Old Testament deserves further discussion, because this understanding of the scriptural warrant is constitutive of their political identity as a chosen people.

<sup>24</sup> Hos 11:12.

<sup>25</sup> Zech 2:12.

<sup>26</sup> Mal 3:17.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Pet 2:9–10, NIV.

### Byzantine Understanding of Scriptural Chosenness

Little has been written on the idea of the chosen people concept with particular reference to how this functioned between the Christian and Jewish theological doctrines and popular belief. Many scholars cite the Byzantine Christian claim to be the chosen people, but few have attempted to explain how this claim worked. The recent *Companion to Byzantium*, an excellent compilation of essays intended to familiarize scholars with the diversity of Byzantine culture as well as some recent areas of research, does not address the Jews anywhere.<sup>28</sup>

In order to address the idea of chosenness among the Byzantines, one must reckon with the Jewish claim to chosenness, with whom the idea originated in the Hebrew scriptures. How did the Byzantines view the chosen people of the Hebrew scriptures? This question is far too large to be addressed in one chapter and has been comprehensively addressed by several excellent essays in a recent compendious volume titled *Jews in Byzantium*.<sup>29</sup> However, some initial sketches of the evidence of Byzantine attitudes towards their own divine election as God’s special people may be attempted.

According to Spyros Troianos, ‘Byzantine law gives repeatedly referred back to Old Testament ideas.’<sup>30</sup> For example, in the *prooimion* of the *Ecloga* (issued 726): ‘The Lord and creator of all things, our God, who created man and distinguished him with autonomy, gave him, as the prophet says, the Law to be his aide (*sic*) and made him aware by that of everything, that which was to be done and that which was to be left undone.’<sup>31</sup> The prophet referred to here is Isaiah, and this is an explicit reference to 8:20 [νόμον γὰρ εἰς βοήθειαν ἔδωκεν] In other words, the writers of the *Ecloga* interpreted Isaiah 8:20 to mean that the law of God should be consulted as a measure for right living. The law referred to here is of course the Pentateuch, which is the foundational story of the people of Israel, yet the Byzantine legislators implicitly appropriate this story for themselves as the people of God who are Christians, the true people of Israel, at least in their eyes.

<sup>28</sup> L. James (ed.), *Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> R. Bonfil et al. (eds.), *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (Leiden, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> S. N. Troianos, ‘Christians and Jews in Byzantium: A Love-Hate Relationship’, in Bonfil et al., *Jews in Byzantium*, 133–48, at 135.

<sup>31</sup> Troianos, ‘Christians and Jews in Byzantium’, 135–6.



How could an unabashedly anti-Judaic culture lay claim to the divinely appointed identity of the very people they called ‘deicides’?<sup>32</sup> This was possible by means of two hermeneutical moves, one theological and one political. First, the honour accorded to the mysterious appearance of the non-Jewish priest Melchizedek could be held up as a legitimate scriptural example of divine blessing resting on a person outside the Israelite community of the Old Testament. Second, the apocalyptic approach to the fulfilment of the eschaton seemed to require, in Byzantine eyes, the coalescing of the Jewish and Christian people from two into one united ‘chosen people’.

Melchizedek appears in the Greek scriptures in three places. The first comes in Genesis 14, after Abram (later renamed Abraham) has returned from a military victory to rescue his nephew Lot, who had been taken captive by an enemy army, along with the people of Lot’s city. Abram’s victory is celebrated in Genesis 14:17–24; in this passage, Abram receives a blessing from a local Canaanite priest-king named Melchizedek, who gives Abram bread and wine, and praises the chief Canaanite deity for the victory. The narrative takes place very early in the biblical story, even before the exodus that was constitutive of Jewish identity, and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood of the Jews, the mediators selected from within the chosen people. The second and third appearances of Melchizedek the non-Israelite priest-king make specific references to the otherwise unattested personage in Genesis 14. Both of these subsequent references identify a ruler who ‘is a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek’.<sup>33</sup> In his discussion of Melchizedek, Dagron observes that these scriptures present a paradox: ‘a sovereign whose name meant “my king is justice” and who reigned in Salem (“peace”), usually identified with Jerusalem, is called priest of the true God, that of Israel, without himself belonging to the chosen race.’<sup>34</sup> Dagron goes on to argue that Paul (or the writer of the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews) resolved the paradox

<sup>32</sup> John of Damascus (d. c.750) argued in his *Second Treatise on the Divine Images* that the beliefs of the Jews were idolatrous and, for that reason, their faith had been superseded by Christian faith. Moreover, he discounts them completely not only as misguided children but as deicides, and [it is implied] therefore no longer chosen by God. A. Louth (ed.), *John of Damascus: Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY, 2003), 59–80, at II.4, 7, 19. For a survey of relevant literature treating theologians and Jews, including the charge of deicide, see V. Déroche, ‘La polémique anti-judaïque au VI<sup>e</sup> et au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Un memento inédit, les Képhalaia’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 277–311.

<sup>33</sup> LXX Ps 109:4; Heb 7:11.

<sup>34</sup> G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003), 173.

by identifying the mysterious figure with Christ, who like Melchizedek is a king of justice who will reign in peace, and 'a priest after the order of Melchizedek', or in other words, not a Levitical (read: Jewish) priest-king.<sup>35</sup> In this way, a divinely chosen ruler, as inheritor of dominion over the chosen people, would not have to be Jewish; rather, to be a priest-king in the order of Melchizedek would seem to require that he be Christian instead of Jewish. Indeed, the Byzantines took this idea and ran with it, as Dagron summarizes, the scriptural episode of this uncircumcised priest-king 'made it possible to reduce the history of the Jews to a simple digression, but at the same time to give solid anchorage in Jewish territory to Christian kingship'.<sup>36</sup>

The reference to Melchizedek as king over 'Salem' is taken by Dagron to refer to his reign over the city of Jerusalem. How could a non-Israelite rule in Jerusalem? This question leads inexorably to the question of how a Christian king in Constantinople could view himself as a successor to Melchizedek. The answer, in the middle Byzantine period, is the identification of Constantinople as the New Jerusalem and the people of Byzantium as the New Israel.<sup>37</sup>

The Byzantines also appropriated Jewish chosenness by compelling the anticipated eschatological fulfilment through forced conversions and baptisms. Indeed, it was because the Christian emperors saw themselves as New Davids that they were bound to attempt to convert the Jews.<sup>38</sup> In 630, Heraclius instituted forced baptism of the Jews. In 722, Leo III, who according to the pope had claimed to be 'both emperor and priest' chose to follow Heraclius's example, and in 874, Basil I also required the Jews to convert. All of these, according to Dagron, wanted to unify the Old Testament chosen people, that is, the Jews, with the New Testament chosen people, the Christians.<sup>39</sup> However, Soffer has more recently argued that the story of the forced conversions is not so much about the persecution of Jews per se, as it is a story of the growing identification of

<sup>35</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 174. Cf. Heb 7:1–17.

<sup>36</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 176. For more detail, see the historiography traced by Dagron in his excellent discussion, 175–81.

<sup>37</sup> J. Pahlitzsch, 'Zur ideologischen Bedeutung Jerusalems für das orthodoxe Christentum', in T. Pratsch (ed.), *Konflikt und Bewältigung. Die Zerstörung der Grabeskirche zu Jerusalem im Jahre 1009*. (Berlin-Boston, 2011), 239–55.

<sup>38</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 147. V. Tsamakda, 'König David als Typus des byzantinischen Kaisers', in F. Daim and J. Drauschke (eds.), *Byzanz – Das Römerreich im Mittelalter. Teil 1: Welt der Ideen, Welt der Dinge* (Mainz, 2010), 23–53.

<sup>39</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 200.

the state with the Orthodox Church.<sup>40</sup> This makes sense, particularly if one understands the 'state' to be the emperor appropriating for himself a priestly role for an eschatological purpose.

In the classic instance of Byzantine appropriation of Jewish chosen identity, Eusebios of Caesarea refers to Constantine the Great as a 'new Moses'. Troianos observes:

In this way, the emperor's law-giving function is granted Christian legitimacy on the one hand, and on the other it also emphasizes that imperial legislation represents a mediating authority for the divine legal system mentioned above. That this Christian interpretation of Roman imperial power found any reverberations at all in the populace is substantiated by early Christian art. At the beginning of the fourth century, a large number of sarcophagi on which Pharaoh's destruction in the Red Sea and Moses' rescue of the Israelites are represented. Here, for the first time, a connection is made between, first of all, the freeing of the Old Testament people of God and the persecuted church of the fourth century; second, the destruction of the 'chosen people's' enemies then and now by floods (the Battle at the Milvian Bridge and the Catastrophe in the Red Sea); and finally the Israeli military leader and Constantine the Great, the 'new Moses.'<sup>41</sup>

Little is controversial about this appropriation; it is well established in Byzantine art and literature from the fourth century onward. The interesting development is that the public image of the Eastern Christian empire as an Old Testament type of kingdom lasted throughout the millennium of the Byzantine era. That indisputable fact is worth exploring here in more detail.

The person and status of the emperor as a 'new Moses', a new lawgiver, should not be passed over lightly. This is momentous. Byzantine Christian rulers chose to be identified with Old Testament Israelite rulers – as 'new Moses', 'new David', and in the case of Leo VI, a 'new Solomon'. This is remarkable when one considers the long-standing supersessionist stance of the Christian church with regard to the Jews, despite their identity as the original 'chosen people' in the Hebrew scriptures. However, this appropriation did have limits.

Unlike the kings in the Hebrew scriptures, Byzantine rulers were not anointed as such until after the eleventh century, that is, well after the Macedonian era that is the focus of this book. Rather, they were crowned, usually at Pentecost, and yet were nonetheless seen as successors in a way to

<sup>40</sup> Y. Soffer, 'The View of Byzantine Jews in Islamic and Eastern Christian Sources', in Bonfil et al., *Jews in Byzantium*, 845–70, at 868.

<sup>41</sup> Troianos, 'Christians and Jews in Byzantium', 137.

the Old Testament kings of Israel. The Old Testament 'had a constitutional value; it had the same normative role in the political sphere as the New Testament in the moral sphere.'<sup>42</sup> All rulers claimed to be also the adopted son of God by virtue of accession to the imperial purple. In Dagron's analysis, every Byzantine emperor viewed himself first as a 'new David', the role of divinely ordained ruler; second, as a 'new Constantine', the successor of Constantine the Great; and third, as the founder or inheritor of a familial dynasty.<sup>43</sup> The first of these one might have expected of a culture dedicated to demonstrating its bona fides as the chosen people of the Old Testament. The second and third echo the ambitions of Byzantium's Roman predecessors.

Troianos identifies late antiquity as a time of transition from a pagan cultural empire to a Christian one, noting that 'the existence of an old and genuine Christian legal culture was demonstrated by the use of the Old Testament, while the imperial regime, which had pagan origins, was legitimized by the early Christian tradition.'<sup>44</sup> By the later ninth century, an emperor such as Leo VI could appropriate Old Testament imagery and allusions to bolster his legitimacy as a Christian ruler in contradistinction to Jews, to Muslims, and to previous Byzantine iconoclast emperors. But this making of identity as a result of 'othering' was already long established. Some would go so far as to say that religious identity in fact cannot be constructed except in contrast to another.<sup>45</sup>

In a fascinating recent book titled *Being Byzantine*, Gill Page lays out a particular approach to ethnic identity that makes use of a classic argument: group identities are contingent upon clear differences with others. In other words, boundaries are formed between 'us' and 'them', or insiders and outsiders of a group, based on cultural markers like religion or language.<sup>46</sup> The memorable metaphor used to describe the inevitability of this boundary marking has likened it to 'the Zen paradox of one hand clapping to express the absurdity of ethnicity existing in a single group which knows no other groups'.<sup>47</sup> The argument of Page's book addresses

<sup>42</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 50. On this theme, see also the excellent volume edited by P. Magdalino, *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992* (Aldershot, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Troianos, 'Christians and Jews in Byzantium', 139.

<sup>45</sup> I. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2007), 65.

<sup>46</sup> G. Page, *Being Byzantine. Greek identity before the Ottomans* (Cambridge, 2008), 18–21.

<sup>47</sup> Page, *Being Byzantine*, 18. The metaphor is attributed to T. Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, 1993).

the crisis of identity in Byzantium after the Fourth Crusade in the thirteenth century, but in the Macedonian era, these boundaries were not set primarily by ethnicity. Rather, it was the cultural marker of religion that differentiated true members of the Byzantine *oikoumene* from Jews, who were forcibly baptized by Basil I, as well as from Saracens, whose military successes prompted Leo VI to write his military manual.

The pattern of articulating identity by means of distinction from others in terms of religion became well established in Byzantine imperial ideology as well as practice. In the sixth century, Justinian – who is coincidentally not viewed by Leo VI as a model to emulate – intensified both the persecution of Jews and the Byzantine imperial preference for the Old Testament. He took this position ‘not least because of its martial usefulness. As an ideology for an empire that desired to assert itself in battle against superior enemies of a different faith, the New Testament message of peace was not suitable. Much more appropriate was the history of the people of Israel, whose bellicose God saved his chosen people from all danger and led them to victory.’<sup>48</sup> This martial attitude is further evidenced by the early sixth-century Akathistos hymn, formally adopted by the church after a siege in 626, and the most famous work of Byzantine hymnography; this hymn celebrates the Mother of God as the protector of Constantinople, calling her ‘unshakeable Tower of the Church’, ‘impregnable fortress of the Kingdom’, and ‘invincible Champion’.<sup>49</sup>

This Christian appropriation of the biblical history of the Jews was convenient for a new ‘chosen people’ who were at war and needed continual deliverance from their enemies through the intercession of God. However, it did not mean that the Jews were embraced. Rather, they were entirely and ungenerally replaced as the chosen people.

As long as the persecution of Christians had continued, there existed a certain analogy between the continuously threatened Old Testament people of Israel and the Christians threatened by the pagan world. Following the autarchy of Constantine the Great, however, Eusebius of Caesarea constructed a transference of the function from the Israelites, as the bearers of God, to the Byzantine Rhomaioi within the context of his political theology . . . After Abraham’s family and after the Jews, the Christians had not stepped into the function of the chosen people, whereby the Roman people and the

<sup>48</sup> Troianos, ‘Christians and Jews in Byzantium’, 140.

<sup>49</sup> For more on this, see L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden, 2001).

Christian people had coincided into a single unit through Constantine's efforts.<sup>50</sup>

The problem for Byzantine Christian identity was that their place as the true inheritors of divine chosenness had been 'proven' so to speak by their success, especially militarily. The Byzantines often associated military success with divine blessing and, conversely, military defeat with the withdrawal of blessing. In the context of the ninth century, then, when the depredations of the Muslim navy were multiplying and the Byzantines were still reeling from the seemingly irrational public beheadings of the Amorion captives, followed by further setbacks on the eastern frontier – most notably the loss of the golden jewelled imperial cross emblem under Basil I – all indications seemed to point to a necessity for Byzantine repentance and holiness. In particular, the Macedonian dynasty had to reckon with the bad reputations of its predecessors and find a way to demonstrate Macedonian piety in order to legitimate their hegemony. Leo's particular method of doing that was to adopt a similar appropriation of Old Testament law, the scripturally based identity of the chosen people, and the impeccable credentials of the imperial Son of David in adopting a royal identity as a new Solomon.

Magdalino, in his 2006 paper addressed to the Twenty-First International Congress of Byzantine Studies, discusses the idea of Byzantine identity in terms of how it was influenced by Orthodoxy.<sup>51</sup> He cites the work of Hans-Georg Beck in *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, in which Beck describes the sense of chosenness claimed by the Byzantines as a special feeling of self-satisfaction (*ein besonderes Selbstgefühl*) that naturally accrues to those who inhabit the space of spiritual monopoly. However, Beck does not go into detail in his discussion to explain how or why the Byzantines appropriated this sense of chosenness. Magdalino identifies one of the crucial turning points in the development of this special feeling: the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. This event, he says, 'promoted a culture of Orthodoxy based on the notion of sacred order, *taxis* or *eutaxia*, of collecting, canonizing, and codifying the holy, which decisively shaped the art and literature, and indeed the whole profile of the Byzantine church'. Byzantine religious culture emphasized good order as a matter of continuity with the Old Testament notion of

<sup>50</sup> Troianos, 'Christians and Jews in Byzantium', 142. See also P. Pieler, 'Das Alte Testament im Rechtsdenken der Byzantiner', in S. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 81–113, at 108.

<sup>51</sup> 2006 London Congress, paper published online.

divinely appointed social hierarchies, including the theology of images. These ideals not only shaped Leo VI, but he in turn, as a ruler coming of age in the decades immediately following this decisive moment, promulgated and developed this cherished ideal of the Byzantines as chosen people.

For Leo, such a people should be governed by a legal code that reflected their religious priorities, and indeed, this is what has been demonstrated in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#). Magdalino's paper helpfully traces the idea of chosenness as a political concept back to the decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which explicitly linked divine favour to the Orthodoxy of the empire. This concept was crystallized in the imagery of the emperor as a Davidic figure, a New David whose faith ensured the safety of the *oikoumene* through victory on the battlefield over the barbarian. Leo VI, aware of the connections between his father and this Davidic ideal, cultivated for himself a Solomonic persona. Thus, as an emperor every bit as 'chosen' as David – perhaps despite his less than glamorous path to the throne and his uncertain parentage – Leo VI could avail himself of the cultural power of biblical rhetoric, redefining and moulding it to fit his own vision of Byzantine chosenness.

Of course, Leo had to reckon with the legacy of the Jews as the original chosen people of the LXX. He was well aware that Justinian had promulgated a law in 553 decreeing Jews could read the scriptures only in Greek (that is, the LXX) or in Latin, although permission was given to use the translation of Aquila, but not the Deuterosis, which was a Mishnaic account of the Pentateuchal law deemed incorrect because it appeared to deny Christian doctrines.<sup>52</sup> The penalties for those who did not comply were severe: corporal punishment, exile, and confiscation of property. Leo VI affirmed the Justinianic law and extended it to include a ban on any Jewish rite whatsoever.<sup>53</sup> He declared that all Jews were to live according to Christian practices alone. Leo gives justification for such a move in Novel 55, where he says that the actions of his father, who 'sanctified' the Jews 'by the vivifying water of baptism' (τῷ ζῶωποιῶν τοῦ βαπτίσματος ἐτελείωσεν ὕδατι),<sup>54</sup> were motivated by a laudable concern for the salvation of the Jews. However, even after these baptisms, which may well have been forced, the Jews were living not by Christian laws,

<sup>52</sup> Justinian, Novel 146. J. Mann, 'Changes in the Divine Service of the Synagogue Due to Religious Persecutions', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 4 (1927), 241–310.

<sup>53</sup> Leo VI, Novel 55.

<sup>54</sup> Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 211, line 9.

but by Jewish ones; Leo declares that henceforth those who returned to living under Jewish precepts would suffer the penalty of an apostate, which was death.<sup>55</sup>

Without understanding the theological motivation of Leo's decision – that is, to ensure the consolidation of both 'chosen peoples', Jews and Christians, into one people – this law could easily be considered nothing more than anti-Jewish persecution. Given the severity of the penalty, it is possible that it was in fact persecution, but it may not have been imposed solely on account of ideological bias. In his *prooimion* to the *Novels* as well as in numerous places throughout the corpus, Leo refers to good legislation as having a prophylactic effect, like a physician who seeks to prevent and correct ill health. Since the emperor's goal is to protect the *oikoumene*, to encourage its health, and to promote greater piety and well-being among its people, it stands to reason that even this absurdly severe law was written with a view towards 'tidying up' after his father's work. He believed that the Jews, an admittedly chosen people, needed some assistance in attaining to the blessedness of true chosenness. How would this work?

### Baptism and Christian Identity

In Orthodox theology, baptism represents the moment at which a Christian achieves personhood; this is why Orthodox believers receive a new name at baptism. One of the primary features of this personhood is the ability, by means of the baptismal gift of the Holy Spirit, to live in such a way that one may progress towards the *telos* of life: being like God. The theologians call this *theosis*, or divinization, and it is not possible without the 'vivifying waters of baptism' as Leo's novel describes them. Apart from these waters, no one has the power to become like God, to be one of the deity's 'chosen people'. By ensuring their baptism, Basil I would have viewed himself as enabling the Jews to begin progressing in *theosis*; by imposing a stricter penalty on baptized [former] Jews, Leo would have viewed himself as providing stronger incentive to live as truly chosen people ought to live, which in his opinion, of course, must be as a Christian.

The eastern exegetical tradition of the New Testament book of Romans offers further elucidation, not only because of its three chapters that address

<sup>55</sup> Leo's Novel 65 refers to the 'punishment of an apostate [which is] death.' [τὴν ἐσχάτην εἰσπραττέω ποινήν, τὴν τῶν ἀποστατῶν κόλασιν ὑφιστάμενος]. Noailles and Dain, *Les nouvelles*, 239, lines 17–18.



the eschatological fate of the Jews since the advent of Christianity.<sup>56</sup> Now, no less than in centuries past, ‘The epistle to the Romans lies at the heart of most of the Eastern Church’s understanding of anthropology and soteriology.’<sup>57</sup> The key to understanding Orthodox theology lies in being able to appreciate fully the role played by human freedom, which is the ability freely to choose (προαίρεσις) participation in *theosis*. This freedom is only possible for the baptized, because without the gift of the Holy Spirit, no one has free choice [read: freedom to choose to become like God]. This anthropology of the Orthodox believer has a long provenance in Eastern Christian theology.

John Chrysostom (d.407), one of the best known of Byzantine theologians and a fourth-century patriarch of Constantinople, received the epithet ‘Goldenmouth’ (Chrysostom in Greek) because of his beautiful preaching. He wrote 32 exegetical homilies on Paul’s epistle to the Romans, which have been praised as ‘by far the most outstanding Patristic commentary on Romans and the finest of all Chrysostom’s works’.<sup>58</sup>

In Homily 2 on Romans, Chrysostom’s exegesis of Romans 1:16–17, he eloquently describes the change that comes over a Christian the moment after baptism: ‘a radical transformation of ἄνθρωπος wrought by the grace of God’.<sup>59</sup> Before this transformation, a human being was unable to keep the law of God; afterwards, says Chrysostom, the struggle for virtue becomes easier. It is this ability to live virtuously that Leo VI was likely seeking to bolster with his Novel 55.

The objection may be made that Chrysostom would hardly have included the Jews in his anthropology of a Christian believer, especially since he also delivered a famous series of polemical homilies (ψόγοι) against the Jews in Antioch.<sup>60</sup> However, in his four homilies on Romans 9–11, the chapters on the Jews, one hears no abusive rhetoric, but rather a discourse on the paradox of their privilege. In his interpretation of ‘the seed of Abraham’

<sup>56</sup> See Rom 9–11, an extended meditation on the doctrine of adoption, the relation between the Jews and Gentiles, the fate of the remnant of Israel, the grafting of the Gentiles onto the stump of Jesse, and the mystery of Israel’s salvation, whom Paul views as irrevocably beloved of God.

<sup>57</sup> G. Kalantzis, ‘“The Voice So Dear to Me”’. Themes from Romans in Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodore’, in D. Patte and V. Mihoc (eds.), *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans* (London, 2013), 83–104, at 98.

<sup>58</sup> J. Quasten, *Patrology, Vol. 3: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Utrecht, 1950), 442.

<sup>59</sup> D. Trakatellis, ‘Being Transformed: Chrysostom’s Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans’, in D. Patte and V. Mihoc (eds.), *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans* (London, 2013), 41–62, at 54.

<sup>60</sup> R. L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the late 4th Century* (London, 1983). Wilken argues that these sermons were not directed at Jews, but at Judaizing Christians (163).

(Rom 9:8), he notes that the true children of God are the children of the promise; in the same way, then, 'the Christians are engendered by words of God, in the water of holy baptism. And this birth is not from nature, but from the promise of God . . . so the generation by means of baptism from above' was determined from the beginning.<sup>61</sup> This exegesis of Chrysostom is very well known, and it is difficult to believe that Leo VI would not have known of it, especially given his religious education.

What is far more surprising is Leo's decree in Novel 58, in which he rules that food must not be made of blood; the prohibition against eating blood is one of the primary dietary laws of the Jewish scriptures. In the prolegomenon to this novel, he cites the law of Moses, and its confirmation by the apostles, who were themselves Jewish.<sup>62</sup> The penalties for violating Leo's novel are extreme: confiscation of property, corporal punishment, tonsure, and exile for life. Even judges who fail to condemn this practice are liable for the stiff fine of ten pounds of gold.

It is notoriously difficult to discern whether this law was obeyed, but since it was long established in canon law, one wonders why Leo considered it imperative to give it the force of civil legislation. One possibility might be that if he intended to enforce Novel 55, forbidding baptized Jews from following Jewish law, it would be inconsistent and not a little embarrassing for Christians not to be held to the exigencies of their own ecclesiastical law. In other words, if some Jews kept the Levitical injunction against eating blood, yet some Christians did not, even though it was based on equally strong scriptural warrant, this might appear to compromise the baptismal gift of the Holy Spirit, which putatively enabled Christians to live more virtuously.

## Conclusion

Smith has listed four basic social aspects that characterize a 'chosen people': community, territory, history, and destiny.<sup>63</sup> Byzantium had all of these in a distinctively pre-modern fashion. Their community was officially and overtly Christian; their territory, although shifting on the edges, was synecdochically understood to be the divinely protected city of Constantinople.<sup>64</sup> Their history was stormy but boasted unparalleled

<sup>61</sup> V. Mihoc, 'Chrysostom on Rom 9–11: Paul and the Jews', in D. Patte and V. Mihoc (eds.), *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans* (London, 2013), 63–82, at 69.

<sup>62</sup> In Lev 17: 10–12; Deut 12:23; and Acts 15:20, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> P. Magdalino, 'Byzantium = Constantinople', in Liz James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2010) 43–54.

continuity with the inheritance of Roman law, Greek scholarship, and Christian religion, and their destiny included the expected eschatological blessing for the ‘children of God’, engendered by the vivifying waters of baptism. More than this, because of their ideological commitment to the Old Testament, they viewed themselves as covenant partners with God, albeit without using the language of covenant.

Covenant as a spiritual principle is marked by moral renewal, unification and cohesion, and purification through separation, all of which can be negated by disobedience and betrayal of the covenant.<sup>65</sup> The Byzantines, particularly after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, focused on moral renewal in their embrace of icons, in contradistinction to the heretical iconoclastic emperors of decades past. The principles of Leo VI’s *Taktika*, focusing on the personal holiness of the ideal Christian general, emphasized the virtues of cohesion as an army united by Christian faith. The purification of behaviour prescribed by newly cleansed legislation demonstrated the life of virtue required of Christians in the Byzantine *oikoumene*. Above all, military losses were seen as proof of Christian sin and a subsequent withdrawal of God’s favour. Thus Byzantine political identity is implicitly coterminous with a covenant identity as the people of God.

In his recent exhaustive article examining Byzantine political identity from the seventh to thirteenth centuries, Stouraitis argues that ‘Constantinopolitan discourse . . . projected an image of the empire’s population as a solid Roman community in both a religious (“Chosen People”) and a political sense (Romanness).’<sup>66</sup> Among the elite in Constantinople, those who kept the records and produced the literature and diplomatic decisions, this image was unequivocally the case. However, the multi-ethnic medieval empire should not be seen as a pre-modern national identity. Kaldellis has recently argued that Byzantium existed as a [Roman] nation-state, or even a republic, as opposed to an empire.<sup>67</sup> However, the theology of chosenness as it was appropriated by the Byzantines demonstrates that they did not view themselves this way. On the contrary, they believed themselves to be the children of God, chosen to supersede the Jewish people who refused to embrace Christianity and vivified by the waters of baptism to participate more fully in becoming like God.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> I. Stouraitis, ‘Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107.1 (2014): 175–220, at 194.

<sup>67</sup> A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2009). A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

*Byzantine Christian Statecraft*

The emperor Leo VI has been described in this book as unexpected, unlikely, and unusual. He was unexpected because as a second son he was not supposed to become emperor. Until Leo's teenage years, the heir apparent was his elder brother Constantine, whose early death in 879 thrust Leo into a role for which he was neither educated nor prepared. In 882, Leo was forced to marry Theophano, a girl chosen by his parents as a suitable future empress. Accused of treason shortly afterwards, he spent three years in confinement, together with the wife he did not love, disgraced for plotting to kill his father, and he was restored only in the summer of 886. Six weeks later he was crowned emperor after the death of Basil I in a hunting accident.

An unlikely emperor, therefore, he rose to the imperial purple without the benefit of any military or even diplomatic experience, nor guidance or training from his father. His statecraft stood in the tradition of Christian *Romanitas* and yet also demonstrated a fresh approach to its execution. Indeed, he became one of the most prolific legislators in the history of Byzantium, second only to Justinian.<sup>1</sup> What made him especially unusual was the production of a lengthy military manual, the *Taktika*, which was, as has been argued in [Chapter 3](#), written not merely to improve military tactics as the title suggests, but primarily to stiffen the resolve of Byzantium's Christian soldiers and sailors who found themselves outnumbered and outfinanced by Arab Muslim raiders.

It is the divergence between two belief systems – Christianity and Islam – that commanded the attention of ninth-century thinkers, including Leo

<sup>1</sup> There are two parainetic texts addressed to Leo, putatively from his father Basil. The longer one enumerates classical virtues, the shorter one only biblical ones. Neither has any advice useful for dealing with external military pressure. For the texts: *Basilii imperatoris paraenesis ad Leonem filium*, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, XXI–LVI and *Basilii imperatoris altera exhortatio*, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, LVII–LX. See also A. Markopoulos, 'Autour des "Chapitres parénétiqes" de Basile 1er', *History and Literature of Byzantium in the 9th–10th Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), XXI.

VI. As the foregoing chapters have attempted to demonstrate, religious language and conviction permeated Byzantine culture, shaping their views on God's role in history and on how the Byzantines waged war, mourned defeat, celebrated victory, and expressed their own distinctive Christian identity under pressure. This is vividly illustrated in the innovative military manual of Leo VI, the *Taktika*. A monumental book worthy of an extended study in itself, the *Taktika* is set at the beginning of this monograph because it innovatively presents a cultural identity crafted in opposition to a troubling and persistent enemy. As such, it cannot be examined without due investigation of the historical circumstances which birthed it and of the extraordinary emperor who composed it.

In order to limit the scope of the present work, this study was approached with three questions in mind: What was Leo VI trying to accomplish in his *Taktika*, his novels, and his homilies? What was his motivation? And, was he successful? His goals were to strengthen and protect the empire, primarily through a creative rearticulation and renewal of ideological commitment, and secondarily to establish the legitimacy of his family dynasty.

Leo's writings reveal a creative mind that thought deeply about the survival of the Byzantine polity and, secondarily, but consciously, about the promotion of his own family 'mythology'. Although the latter is less evident in his military manual than in other works, Leo showed concern for his own image as a Byzantine Solomon, and for the survival of the Macedonian dynasty, perhaps most immediately visible in his determination to father a legitimate son. He also demonstrated solicitude for the development of the Christian *oikoumene*, over which he was unexpectedly given dominion. His novels reveal a thoroughgoing project to refine Byzantine Christian corporate identity as a people of God, dedicated to the Orthodoxy expressed in ecclesiastical decrees like the late seventh-century Council in Trullo and the iconodule Triumph of Orthodoxy of 843. Despite these internal concerns, he was also attentive to foreign affairs, and especially Byzantium's military security.

### Foreign Policy

He explicitly stated his reason for writing the *Taktika*: it was his response to the depredations of the 'Saracens'.<sup>2</sup> How does an emperor with no military

<sup>2</sup> Epilogue 71, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 1093B. G. T. Dennis (ed.), *The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC, 2014), 640–3. "Ὅσα δὲ κεφάλαια ἕτερα τὰ, ὡς εἰκόσ, ἀπάντων τὰ ἐν ἑκάστῳ πολέμου καιρῷ ἢ τιος ἐκείνου παρασκευῆς καὶ μάλιστα ἐν τῷ νῦν ἡμῶν

credentials compose such a manual, and how does he convince his generals to read it or trust his advice in it? Leo's answer was twofold: he gave it the weight of legislation, and he clothed it in terms of Christian duty, ideals, and order. To add military credibility, he appropriated the most recent Byzantine manual in his archive: the *Strategikon* of Maurice, an emperor known both for his prowess on the battlefield and for his personal piety, including a death so honourable he was later considered a saint. Bolstering the credentials of his conclusions, Leo took care to claim not only Maurice's wisdom, but also more up-to-date intelligence from his own illustrious father as well as current dispatches from Byzantium's generals.<sup>3</sup> The cleverness of this approach should not be underestimated. By using their own military reports, Leo anticipates the objections that professional soldiers might have to being instructed by a non-soldier; this both flatters his generals and gives substance to Leo's claim to imperial qualities, especially πρόνοια<sup>4</sup> and ἀγρυπνία,<sup>5</sup> a watchful sort of preparedness that implies unceasing attentiveness.

To give his manual unimpeachable authority, he infused it with biblical language, allusions, and direct quotes. To give it force, he explicitly declared that the book is to be followed as mandatory legislation.<sup>6</sup> In the epilogue, however, he includes and expands the dictum of Maurice that no one can anticipate every situation, and that this book should also be viewed as presenting not just prescriptions but a framework for military endeavours. What is that framework? It is emphatically a Christian worldview, with a hierarchy, a cosmology, and a clear standard of ethics. And it is juxtaposed in Leo's book to the rival worldview of Islam. It is the consideration of Christianity vis-à-vis the forces of Islam that sets apart this book from its predecessors in the genre.

When locating Leo's *Taktika* in its historical context, one must appreciate that for most of his reign, Byzantium was under pressure from both

ἐνοχλοῦντι Σαρακηνῶν ἔθνει, δι' ὅπερ, ὡς εἴρηται που ἡμῖν, καὶ τὸ παρὸν συντέτακται βιβλίον. Also *Taktika* 18.103 (Dennis, 474).

<sup>3</sup> *Taktika* 18.123 (Dennis, 18.117, 480), 19.1 (Dennis, 502).

<sup>4</sup> Rendered in German as 'vorausschauende Fürsorge'; in English, 'foresighted welfare.' H. Hunger, *Das Byzantinische Herrscherbild* (Darmstadt, 1975), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Hunger, *Das Byzantinische Herrscherbild*, 94. Both terms are used in reference to the emperor in the Prologue to the *Taktika*.

<sup>6</sup> *Taktika*, prologue, *Patrologia Graeca* 107, 677C. Dennis, 6. "Ὡσπερ οὖν ἄλλον τινα πρόχειρον νόμον ὑμῖν, ὡς εἴρηται, στρατηγικὸν τὴν παρούσαν πραγματείαν ὑπαγορεύοντες προσεχῶς τε καὶ ἐπιπόνως ἀκούειν ὑμῶν παρακελεύομεθα. See also P. Magdalino, 'The Non-Judicial Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI', in S. Troianos (ed.), *Analecta Atheniensia ad ius Byzantinum spectantia I* (Athens, 1997), 169–82; J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Trois études sur Léon VI', *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), 229.

land and sea attacks by Muslims. Although his most evident goal was clearly to rejuvenate military science in order to respond more effectively to these pressures, he could not possibly have presented a manual that ignored the ideological divide between Islam and Christianity if he hoped to achieve a reversal in the empire's fortunes in battle. His was the very first manual that addressed the problem of Muslim military aggression; Maurice's book, although the most recently produced Byzantine military manual, dated from the late sixth century, before the rise of Islam. Moreover, Leo was writing in the same court milieu that produced the anti-Muslim polemic of Niketas.

The massive invasion in 838 that pierced deeply into Asia Minor, routed the emperor's armies, took Ancyra without a fight, and culminated in the siege, betrayal, fall, and massacre of thousands of Byzantines at Amorion was devastating, but these misfortunes were only the opening shots in a fusillade of woes. The subsequent slavery of the survivors, slaughter of prisoners, and unrelieved captivity of more than three dozen high-ranking Byzantine officers, several related to the emperor's family, slammed home the losses on the battlefield. When embassies to negotiate their release were rebuffed, losses in mountain skirmishes mounted up, and insults came from the caliph after the failure of the usually reliable tactic of offering gold, Byzantium was forced to acknowledge its weakness. Despite holding more Muslim prisoners, and therefore a stronger position for negotiating the release of their own, Byzantium was unable to convince al-Mutawakkil to release the 42 men of Amorion. In March of 845, when those men were beheaded on the banks of the Tigris, against all precedent, hope, and expectation, the news struck Constantinople hard, leaving ripples of shock that never entirely dissipated.

It was against the backdrop of ongoing border raids and pirate attacks, with the annually renewed memory of the martyrdom of the 42 from Amorion that Leo wrote his military manual. Little wonder that he sought theological answers to explain the apparent disfavour of God, and a renewal of the arts of war. However, Leo's book is not focused exclusively on military science, despite his announcements in the Prologue. In particular, he rearranges the material in Maurice's *Strategikon* and Onasander's *Strategikos* to serve his primary purpose of revitalizing Byzantine military science through the concept of the ideal general, who in turn represents a specifically Christian concept of hierarchy, which Leo wishes to emphasize. Naturally, the emperor himself has a place in this hierarchy, above the general and below the deity. In this way, Leo reflects, communicates, and indeed shapes Byzantine corporate identity in a way that reinforces God's

sovereignty, order, and rewards for spiritual and physical discipline, especially loyalty to himself as emperor.

Leo's work is prodigious, but most scholarly attention has focused on Constitution 19, because it is a unique text without any evident predecessor, and on Constitution 18, and particularly the ethnographic excursus on the Saracens, which is also new. This study has considered Constitution 19 only peripherally, because it offers no explicitly biblical language for analysis and otherwise has been studied extensively already. Constitution 18 was the subject of a groundbreaking, if limited, study by Dagron, who noted its subtle suggestion of mimesis. However, in order to understand the full impact of the material of Constitution 18, this study has argued, one must consider it in the context of the rest of the manual. This study has examined Constitutions 2 and 20 in detail for their biblical approach to warfare through the trope of the godly general, a kind of martial 'holy man'. It has also considered the Prologue and the Epilogue in particular, because the former announces Leo's intention, while the latter offers a focused précis of the entire work.

Plainly, Leo wanted to bolster morale so that the soldiers would go forward more confidently into battle. He made it plain that the key to military success depended on the competence and piety of the general. It is this emphasis on the character of the general that shows an even deeper level at which the text is operating. That is to say, by emphasizing the order of authority, or the 'chain of command' as it were, Leo is making a statement about strength that is available to Christians by virtue of being under the care of an all-powerful God. He uses the aphorism of Hannibal twice, reminding his generals that they are required to demonstrate the strength and boldness of a lion, even if those who follow them are as timid as deer.

The idea is that the further up the chain of command one goes, the greater the power and strength one finds, with God at the top. Of course, since the emperor is the chosen representative of God, he must be even stronger than the generals who serve at his command, but it is a strength defined not by military prowess or mere brawn. In this hierarchy, it is spiritual strength in the form of piety that determines rank, and therefore even a non-military man like himself could have credibility. God, who is perfect, has the most strength and power; on a human level, all Byzantine piety is geared towards the believer developing ever more holiness. At the heart of this subtle argument, Leo sought to craft a Byzantine cultural identity with its greatest prosperity in renewed and characteristic Christian piety.

He demanded that the general set an example of spiritual strength and every Christian virtue, and that the soldiers also demonstrate Christian



holiness, because of their calling to be 'defenders of the faith'. This accords with the distinctive Byzantine view of their wars as purely defensive ones, intended to recover land that was taken from them, not to conquer new lands. From the beginning, he abjured open attack in favour of spirited defence, in order to assure peace. Military success for Leo involved a renewal of military science, as he understood it, but even more important, it required that the Byzantine army capitalize on the spiritual advantages enjoyed by Christians.

### Byzantine 'Holy War'?

Leo carefully articulated the usual Byzantine view when it comes to actual military engagement: 'For it is wrong, as we have said many times, to risk some people's lives in open war, even though one may seem to have numerical superiority over the enemy.'<sup>7</sup> He expressed an acute distrust of pitched battles, a reflection of the Orthodox Christian distaste for killing if it can be avoided and a long-standing Byzantine tradition of minimizing risk.<sup>8</sup> Such remarks are typical of Byzantine military manuals, because they 'were compelled to manoeuvre, to use delaying tactics, to employ ambushes and other stratagems to even the odds stacked against them ... it was quite clearly a main war aim to win without having to fight a decisive battle'.<sup>9</sup> This also draws a contrast with the Islamic theology of conquest. Those who engage in *jihad* are equally pleased whether they perish or survive, but Christian soldiers want to see victory as well as survive the battle. There was no extra reward in biblical Christianity for dying in battle, regardless of the identity of the enemy.

However, the Christian view of war is complex. The Hebrew scriptures claim God as the origin and animating force for the call to arms,<sup>10</sup> and the

<sup>7</sup> *Taktika*, 18.127 (Dennis 18.121, 483).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Strategikon*: 'It is well to hurt the enemy by deceit, by raids, or by hunger, and never be enticed into a pitched battle, which is a demonstration more of luck than of bravery' (83); 'The general achieves the most who tries to destroy the enemy's army more by hunger than by force of arms' (85); 'The best leader is one who does not willingly engage in a hazardous and highly uncertain battle and refrains from emulating those who carry out operations recklessly and are admired for their brilliant success, but one who, while keeping the enemy on the move, remains secure and always in circumstances of his own choosing' (87); 'It is better to try to employ different surprises and risks as much as possible rather than engage in a pitched battle which involves dangers which could prove fatal' (93).

<sup>9</sup> J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium at War* (Oxford, 2002), 36.

<sup>10</sup> 'And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you' etc. (Deut 4:1-14) Also the commissioning of Joshua as commander of the army of conquest

New Testament holds apparent contradictions on the subject of bloodshed.<sup>11</sup> Generally it advocates civil obedience,<sup>12</sup> but can be construed to conflate secular military service and sacred spiritual worship.<sup>13</sup> In any case, there is no unequivocally firm exegetical ground in the New Testament to support a religious call to arms.<sup>14</sup>

The official Byzantine Orthodox position, as set down by Leo in the *Taktika*, seemed to be a rather different kind. He plays a sort of brinkmanship using religious observance as the measure of true faith and piety, with the central caveat that Christian doctrine, if not contemporary practice, is superior. However, this does not equate to a doctrine of 'holy war' in Byzantium, because there was no clear indication of God's command and no religious 'call to arms'. If a holy war 'must be promulgated by a religious authority, which is also the sole authority capable of granting remission of sins or declaring the warriors martyrs',<sup>15</sup> then Byzantine practice could not qualify. Although the emperor ultimately controlled the army, he did not have the power to declare warriors martyrs nor to remit sins. The Byzantine government was not a caesaro-papist system, even though Leo VI considered the patriarch dispensable.<sup>16</sup>

One suggestion changes the question in a helpful way. Tia Kolbaba has remarked, 'Instead of asking *whether* Byzantium had a notion of holy war, one could ask *in what ways* Byzantine wars were perceived by their participants as divinely ordained, aided, and rewarded.'<sup>17</sup> While this resolves the question of defining 'Byzantine holy war', it sidesteps the problem of the inevitable comparison between Muslim and Christian attitudes towards making war on one another. In her discussion, Kolbaba

(Josh 1:1–9) and the appearance of God as the commander of the army of the Lord to Joshua before the fall of Jericho (Josh 5:13–6:7), among other texts.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. '[Jesus said] Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (Matt 10:34) and 'Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword."' (Matt 26:52)

<sup>12</sup> Rom 13:1–7 ('Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God' etc.).

<sup>13</sup> 'Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.' (2 Tim 2:3–4)

<sup>14</sup> M. Canard claims that holy war itself is a principle foreign to Christianity, despite the universal mission of Jesus. The triumph of faith at the price of bloody conflict is contrary to the very spirit of Christianity. See M. Canard, 'La guerre sainte dans le monde islamique et dans le monde chrétien', in *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient* (London, 1973), viii, 610–11.

<sup>15</sup> Angeliki Laiou, 'On Just War in Byzantium', in J. S. Langdon and J. S. Allen (eds.), *To Ellhnikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.* (New Rochelle NY, 1993), 153.

<sup>16</sup> T. Antonopoulou, *Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, 1997), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Tia Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire', *Byzantion* 68 (1998), 202.

admits that ‘most Byzantine wars are not seen as wars against infidels or heretics.’<sup>18</sup> She goes on to say that ‘Byzantines did not rally round the cross as their crusader-cousins did’.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Byzantines understood the will of God only in retrospect. That is, victory necessarily meant God’s victory, since all effort blessed by God received divine aid. Defeat, on the other hand, came as a result of sin on the part of the defeated Byzantines. After too many defeats, Leo’s contribution to the war effort was a combination of getting closer to God and paying attention to how a godly warrior like Maurice had done it. Thus ‘dying for God’ became a model not just for martyrs facing a pagan authority, but for Christian soldiers facing a Muslim enemy, and Leo VI acknowledged this when he encouraged his armies to see themselves not just as defenders of the patria, but of the Christian *oikoumene*.<sup>20</sup>

The idealized Christian conqueror image was also used by Leo VI to adorn his own reputation. He did this rather dramatically by including Muslim prisoners at imperial banquets for the two holiest feast days of the Byzantine Christian calendar: Christmas and Easter. Muslim hostages attended these banquets dressed in white robes, which is traditionally the garb of catechumens preparing to be baptized into the Orthodox faith. Alicia Walker explains that this practice ‘promoted [Leo VI] as the ecumenical ruler of the diverse people of the world, but did so in a way that conveyed the capacity for Muslims to become Christian – and thereby Byzantine – while still making clear his own triumphal might as conqueror of foreign peoples and shepherd of the Christian flock’.<sup>21</sup>

### Biblical Motifs in Byzantine Identity

The definition, or redefinition, or articulation of Byzantine Christian identity was a project undertaken apparently to distinguish Byzantines from Muslim Arabs. However, it also had a secondary, internal dynamic, in that all of the emperors who promulgated this pious collective identity also had issues of legitimacy and wanted to use the Christianness of Byzantines for their own advantage. This obviously entailed a commitment, whether real or not, to the Church so that the emperor would be seen as the right

<sup>18</sup> Kolbaba, ‘Fighting’, 204. She goes on to say that ‘some are’ but does not elaborate or identify which ones she means.

<sup>19</sup> Kolbaba, ‘Fighting’, 210.

<sup>20</sup> *Taktika*, 18.19 (Dennis 18.16, p. 443), 133 (Dennis 18.127, p. 485).

<sup>21</sup> A. Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.* (Cambridge, 2012), 76.

man to fulfil the divine calling as God's representative on earth. This necessitated a cleverness about relations with the Church itself. Basil I and Leo VI built or renovated scores of churches in Constantinople. Leo VI had to bolster his image not only as an emperor who could be trusted to protect the *oikoumene* from Muslims at a time of imminent military threat, but also as a good Christian, despite his serial marriages and failure to produce a legal heir. Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos required the use of his epithet to remind everyone of his legitimacy despite the fact that his parents were unmarried when he was born. He designed and codified elaborate ceremonial in Constantinople, with himself as a key participant, and wrote speeches to his eastern armies that employed biblical language and were accompanied by relics and prayers. Nikephoros II Phokas, who did not need to burnish his reputation as a Christian (given his asceticism) nor his trustworthiness as an emperor who could protect Byzantium from Muslims (given his military feats), nevertheless also clashed with the Church when he tried to elevate a popular belief to legal obligation.

Although Byzantium was not a static entity, but one that developed and changed over time, the shared culture of the Byzantines was rooted in their religion. Even if it did not reflect political realities, the Byzantines viewed their polity, their *oikoumene*, through the eyes of faith. They claimed that Constantinople was a completely Christian city, even when it was still pagan.<sup>22</sup> Public ceremonial was decidedly liturgical, and often prescribed the recitation of hymns, the participation of the patriarch, the singing of hymns. The majority of its art followed a religious theme, and its greatest and most lasting architecture was the great sanctuary of the Hagia Sophia. This is not to say that all Byzantines were religious, or merely that the Orthodox faith was embedded in their society. The key point is that even if they engaged in what one might call secular pursuits, like warfare, or diplomacy, or art, or music, they nonetheless did all of this within a religious framework, a worldview that did not, as a rule, see the world as anything other than a Christian *oikoumene*, ruled by God and his viceroy, the emperor.

Recently, Anthony Kaldellis has argued that 'Modern reconstructions of the Byzantine political sphere focus on only one of its two legitimizing ideologies, the theocratic one', and neglect the identity encompassed by the Roman polity (*politeia*) or republic.<sup>23</sup> He has criticized what he calls

<sup>22</sup> Eusebios, *Life of Constantine*, III.48.1–2, in A. Cameron and S. G. Hall (eds.), *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999), 140.

<sup>23</sup> A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 32.

our ‘fixation on the theocratic model’, asserting instead that it was ‘in terms of the *politeia* that the *basileia* was defined and justified, not the reverse’.<sup>24</sup> The argument presented in this monograph views matters quite differently. The vaunted institutional stability of the Byzantine state (or republic, if one prefers) arose not from an inherited notion of Roman polity, but from the cultural ballast offered by institutional Christianity. This is evident from its presence and visible influence in legislation, military affairs, and even diplomacy.

### Solomonic Imperial Wisdom

The wholesale dismissal by scholars, therefore, of much religious language and belief as historical ‘chaff’ smacks of a kind of intellectual imperialism. Western secular views of the biblically shaped expressions and attitudes of early medieval Byzantines impose a foreign and perhaps atheistic standard. Byzantium was a culture steeped in the Orthodox Christian religion which viewed itself as serving a distinctively Christianized Old Testament deity. The Christian religion was their characteristic discourse, from which Byzantines drew their collective identity.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, they could not have drawn it from a single ethnicity or language, as the Byzantine empire included a multiplicity of those. Rather, it was a shared history of a Roman empire, Christianized by imperial decree, flooded with the aspirations of ‘holy men’, and fraught by the danger posed by a rival monotheistic religion that shaped Byzantine identity. From the early medieval era, the core was always Christianity, inevitably propagated by words, whether in homilies, hagiography, or histories.

Boyarin has noted that ‘it is on the borders, at the contact zones, that we find “religions” being produced (rather like the production of continents at the borders between tectonic plates).’<sup>26</sup> So it is with Byzantium. In the ‘contact zones’ where Christianity and Islam were in conflict, whether military, theological, or personal, the distinctive attitudes of the Old Testament were manifested. The debates raged over the morality of killing, the value of divine holy books, the status of respective prophets, and the right view

<sup>24</sup> Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the Christian emphasis on words and discourse, see A. Cameron, ‘How Many Rhetorics?’, in her *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, 1991), 15–46.

<sup>26</sup> D. Boyarin, ‘Semantic Differences; or “Judaism”/“Christianity”’, in A. Becker and A. Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen, 2003), 66.

of eschatological expectations. The development therefore of polemical literature in the ninth century was intended to articulate and reinforce ideological boundaries on both sides of the Christian–Muslim frontier. On the Greek side in particular, it constituted ‘part of a move towards finding a new cultural and intellectual identity’.<sup>27</sup> But because Byzantium was a culture that resisted forgetfulness and constructed rituals to remember the past, it was not seeking something new so much as a rearticulation of long-held convictions that would make sense of a changing and uncertain present. The instability of imperial succession throughout the Macedonian dynasty gave impetus to a populace seeking sources of stability, protection, and authority.

From the beginning of the Macedonian dynasty, emperors had issues of legitimacy to contend with, and their literary output reveals a deeply held and creative commitment to enhancing their own images. Byzantine faith in the divine leadership of its emperors had eroded, ever since the rise of Islam.<sup>28</sup> This trend has been identified and associated with the rise of Byzantine interest in other means of protection, namely icons and saints.<sup>29</sup> Leo VI recognized this more than anyone before him, and moved to show himself a solid spiritual protector of his people, specifically in the arena of defending Byzantium from the Muslims. In so doing, he creatively combined a rearticulation of Byzantine Christian identity with a reason to trust in his own rule by building in a position of spiritual authority for himself that was not dependent on military expertise. Byzantines’ reliance upon saints for protection had grown as its emperors had shown themselves impotent in the face of long-range invasions, like the one that destroyed Amorion, and overwhelming losses in the Mediterranean, like the loss of Crete, which materially affected their commercial well-being and economic health.

The main objective of this study was to explore Leo’s employment of Christian idiom and ideals as a vital force in changing relations with

<sup>27</sup> A. Cameron, ‘Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period’, in G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Leuven, 1991), reprinted in A. Cameron, *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1996), 111, 108.

<sup>28</sup> See A. Cameron, ‘Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium’, *Past and Present* 84 (1979), 3–35, and ‘The Virgin’s Robe: An Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Byzantium’, *Byzantion* 49 (1979), 42–56; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Island dwellers subject more than most to raids from Arab pirates express their hope of protection in saints rather than the emperor or his forces. See J. Shepard, ‘Byzantium in Equilibrium, 886–944’, in T. Reuter (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, 1999), 3: 553–66.

Muslims, in the self-understanding of Byzantine Christians, and in his own imperial legacy as a new Solomon. In order to discern this Christian idiom, his texts have been examined with a sensitivity for biblical language and allusions. The idea for this approach originally came from a comment once made by early British Byzantinist Georgina Buckler (d.1953), that she had wanted to write a book about 'how the Byzantines used the Bible'.<sup>30</sup> Such a project is obviously beyond the scope of this monograph, but her idea has been applied on a limited scale to a few notable cases from Leo's oeuvre, to discover how at least one Byzantine in a position to wield great influence used the Bible, particularly in his thinking, writing, interaction with Islam, and outworking of divine *taxis*.

Thus this monograph has been concerned with intellectual history, with militarized politics and an analysis of the viscera of behaviour between Christianity and Islam, and in particular, the development of a consciously Christian political identity in Byzantium. Few scholars have considered theological differences or how these may have affected other kinds of interaction. Yet this study has aimed to show that the Byzantines drew stark distinctions between Christian and Islamic piety, and connected Byzantine Orthodoxy – especially where the emperor was concerned – with success in warfare. As a result, Byzantium forged a new self-identity as a distinctively Christian empire during the tenth century, creatively combining the Constantinian legacy of military victory and Christian faith in a new way that suited their changed circumstances, particularly at crisis points where the political survival of an emperor with tenuous authority was at stake. It has sought to discover not so much how Byzantium waged war, but why, and what impact their religion had on Byzantine militarized politics.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Usefulness of Understanding Religious Language**

Although using biblical language or quotations was an integral part of demonstrating a text's congruence with authoritative norms and ideals

<sup>30</sup> C. Roueché, 'Georgina Buckler: The Making of a British Byzantinist', in R. M. Beaton and C. Roueché (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History: Essays for D. M. Nicol* (London, 1993), 174–96, esp. 194 and 196.

<sup>31</sup> Related studies include Kolbaba, 'Fighting'; V. Laurent, 'L'idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantine', *Revue historique du sud-est européen* 23 (1946), 71–98; N. Oikonomides, 'The Concept of "Holy War" and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories', in T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1995), 62–86; G. Michaelides-Nouaros, 'Ο δίκαιος πόλεμος κατά τὰ Τακτικά Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ', in *Σύμμεικτα Σεφεριάδου* (Athens, 1961), 411–34; M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

in Byzantium, most historians discard the religious language as chaff or as superficial cultural ‘noise’. This study has sought to recalibrate the modern reception of these texts. Rather than seeking a kernel of useful (i.e. non-theological) historical material, it has tried to recalibrate the dial, so to speak, and find clarity where previously there was only static. For a Byzantine, the core presence of religious vocabulary and biblical allusion gave weight and validity to the content of a book or an idea, a sensitivity that is not automatically shared by modern interpreters. Crucially, these things also gave authority and acceptability to the author of a given text. This legitimacy was sought even (or perhaps chiefly) by emperors eager to demonstrate their divine chosenness, since imperial authority was bestowed in a variety of ways in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>32</sup>

Although they are very different religions, Leo VI daringly chose to recommend a careful sort of mimesis of Arab Muslim practice for Byzantine Christian soldiers in order to effect a change in the momentum of Christian–Muslim warfare. He drew upon a deep cultural commitment to the superiority of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity, showing a new way to regain military effectiveness in the opposition of ideologies. His goal was to turn the tide, despite setbacks, and renew Byzantine military strategic thinking. Byzantine writers in the ninth century and later were profoundly affected by the theological threat of Islam, chiefly because of the illegitimate (from their point of view) military successes enjoyed by invading Muslim armies. The development of liturgical language in the ninth and tenth centuries, especially in describing the death of Christ on the Cross and the way of salvation, began to use more and more of the imagery of battle and victory.<sup>33</sup> The siege of Amorion and the story of the 42 martyrs, dramatized by Evodios and memorialized forever afterward in the Lenten liturgy of the Orthodox Church, reinforced an underlying uneasiness with Islamic doctrine that went beyond annual raids.

### Conclusion

Leo’s response to these events and his ideas were employed and magnified by his son Constantine VII to achieve not only success on the battlefield but dynastic security in the capital. Byzantium’s renewed self-identity as a

<sup>32</sup> Dagron considers Macedonian-era imperial authority granted through a ‘legitimacy of rupture’ (for usurpers) as well as a ‘legitimacy of continuity’ (for porphyrogenniti). G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003), 35.

<sup>33</sup> J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago, 1974), 138–9. He cites Nikephoros the patriarch and Theodore Stoudios.



Christian empire contributed to its rise as an eastern power in the tenth century. His imperial propaganda sought to emphasize political stability, military recovery against strong perennial enemies, and the superiority of Orthodox Christianity over the Islamic belief of those enemies. Proof of this superiority was thought to be located in the power of relics such as the Mandylion at long last transferred from Edessa, the hand of John the Baptist recovered from Damascus, and the icons of Mary, which were used as palladia to protect the city of Constantinople.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, however, it was the distinctively Byzantine Christian identity articulated and fleshed out in the myriad writings of Leo VI that would inspire later rulers of the Macedonian dynasty. Although he had been unexpected when he came to the imperial purple, after 26 years of rule with a rejuvenated military spirit, an orderly imperial legislation, and a clear grasp of the theology of chosenness, Leo VI showed himself to be extraordinary.

<sup>34</sup> B. V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006) has documented the shift in Byzantine cult from relics to icons in the later tenth century. At the time of Constantine VII, the importance of relics was rising, and there is evidence that military leaders took pains to collect and bring back as many relics as possible from the lands beyond the Taurus mountains. Cf. W. B. R. Saunders, 'The Aachen Reliquary of Eustathius Maleinus, 969–970', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 36 (1982), 211–19.



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